



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



FRIDAY — 4 MAR 2022

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Events, Opportunities

HEADLINE	03/04 Sweden warms to NATO membership
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/majority-swedes-favour-joining-nato-poll-2022-03-04/
GIST	<p>STOCKHOLM/COPENHAGEN, March 4 (Reuters) - A majority of Swedes are in favour of joining NATO, a poll showed on Friday, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine spurring a rapid shift in attitudes in a country long known for neutrality.</p> <p>Sweden has not been in a war since 1814 and has built its foreign policy on "non-participation in military alliances." It remained neutral throughout World War Two even as neighbouring Nordic countries were invaded, and during the Cold War.</p> <p>A poll by Demoskop and commissioned by Aftonbladet newspaper showed 51% of Swedes are now in favour of NATO, up from 42% in January. People against joining fell to 27% from 37%. It's the first time such a poll has shown a majority in favour.</p> <p>However, Sweden's Defence Minister Peter Hultqvist said joining NATO was not an easy decision, nor one that could be rushed based on recent events alone.</p> <p>"To change the defence doctrine, that is a very huge decision, so you don't do it overnight and you cannot do it because of opinion polls," he told a news conference in Copenhagen where he met his Danish and British counterparts.</p> <p>The shift in opinion echoes that in close ally and NATO non-member Finland, where the head of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs described Russia's attack on Ukraine as a wake-up call and "Europe's 9/11 for Finns."</p> <p>Moscow says it is conducting a "special operation" to disarm its neighbour and capture leaders it calls neo-Nazis.</p> <p>Sweden and Finland already have very close cooperation with NATO and have been invited to recent summits. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said in January the two countries could join the alliance "very quickly" if they decided to apply for membership.</p> <p>"Sweden is incredibly close to the United Kingdom, it is incomprehensible that Britain would not come and support Sweden in nearly any scenario whatsoever," British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said.</p> <p>"Sweden is part of the same family so we would stand by Sweden, we would do anything we could to support both militarily and in other ways," he said.</p> <p>Russia has warned Sweden and Finland against joining NATO. Sweden took the decision this month to send weapons to Ukraine, the first time since 1939 Sweden sent weapons to a country at war.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/04 February job growth surprisingly strong
SOURCE	https://www.cnbc.com/2022/03/04/jobs-report-february-2022.html
GIST	<p>Job growth accelerated in February, posting its biggest monthly gain since July as the employment picture got closer to its pre-pandemic self.</p> <p>Nonfarm payrolls for the month grew by 678,000 and the unemployment rate was 3.8%, the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics reported Friday.</p> <p>That compared to estimates of 440,000 for payrolls and 3.9% for the jobless rate.</p>

In a sign that inflation could be cooling, wages barely rose for the month, up just 1 cent an hour or 0.03%, compared to estimates for a 0.5% gain. The year-over-year increase was 5.13%, well below the 5.8% Dow Jones estimate.

For the labor market broadly, the report brought the level of employed Americans closer to pre-pandemic levels, though still short by 1.14 million. Labor shortages remain a major obstacle to fill the 10.9 million jobs that were open at the end of 2021, a historically high gap that had left about 1.7 vacancies per available workers.

As has been the case for much of the pandemic era, leisure and hospitality led job gains, adding 179,000 for the month. The job gap for that sector, which was hit most by government-imposed restrictions, is 1.5 million from pre-Covid levels. The unemployment rate for the industry tumbled to 6.6%, a slide of 1.6 percentage points from January and closer to the 5.7% of February 2020.

Other sectors showing strong gains included professional and business services (95,000), Health care (64,000), construction (60,000), transportation and warehousing (48,000) and retail (37,000). Manufacturing contributed 36,000 and financial activities rose 35,000.

Previous months saw upward revisions. December moved up to 588,000, an increase of 78,000 from the previous estimate, while January's rose to 481,000. Together, the revisions added 92,000 more than previously recorded and brought the three-month average to 582,000.

The labor force participation rate, a closely watched metric indicating worker engagement, moved higher to 62.3%, still 1.1 percentage points from the February 2020 pre-pandemic level. An alternative measure of unemployment that includes discouraged workers and those holding parttime jobs for economic reasons, and is sometimes referred to as the "real" unemployment rate, also edged up, to 7.2%.

The trend for jobs is clearly upward after a wintertime surge of omicron cases, while exacting a large human toll, left little imprint on employment.

The economy also has been wrestling with pernicious inflation pressures running at their highest levels since the early 1980s stagflation days. The Labor Department's main inflation gauge showed consumer prices rising at a 7.5% clip in January, a number that is expected to climb to close to 8% when February's report is released next week.

Amid it all, companies continue to hire, filling broad gaps still left in the leisure and hospitality sector as well as multiple other pandemic-struck industries.

The Federal Reserve is watching the jobs numbers closely. Monetary policymakers widely view the economy as near full employment, adding pressure to prices that have soared amid supply shortages and demand surges related to the pandemic.

Inflation has come as Congress has pumped more than \$5 trillion in stimulus into the economy while the Fed has kept benchmark borrowing rates anchored near zero and injected nearly \$5 trillion into the economy through asset purchases.

Now, Fed officials expect this month to start raising interest rates, with market expectations that those hikes likely will continue through the year.

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HEADLINE	03/04 DOT: rise road crash fatalities, fatality rate
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/transportation/dot-reports-highest-number-of-road-crash-fatalities-and-highest-fatality-rate-since-2007/

GIST	<p>The U.S. Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has released its 2020 annual traffic crash data, showing that 38,824 lives were lost in traffic crashes nationwide. That number marks the highest number of fatalities since 2007.</p> <p>The estimated number of police-reported crashes in 2020 decreased by 22% as compared to 2019, and the estimated number of people injured declined by 17%.</p> <p>While the number of crashes and traffic injuries declined overall, fatal crashes increased by 6.8%. The fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled increased to 1.34, a 21% increase from 2019 and the highest since 2007.</p> <p>In 45% of fatal crashes, the drivers of passenger vehicles were engaged in at least one of the following risky behaviors: speeding, alcohol impairment, or not wearing a seat belt.</p> <p>“The rising fatalities on our roadways are a national crisis; we cannot and must not accept these deaths as inevitable,” said U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. “People should leave the house and know they’re going to get to their destination safely, and with the resources from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, plus the policies in the National Roadway Safety Strategy we launched last month, we will do everything we can to save lives on America’s roads.”</p> <p>“The tragic loss of life of people represented by these numbers confirms that we have a deadly crisis on our nation’s roads. While overall traffic crashes and people injured were down in 2020, fatal crashes and fatalities increased. We cannot allow this to become the status quo,” said Dr. Steven Cliff, NHTSA’s Deputy Administrator.</p> <p>In January, the U.S. DOT released the federal government’s comprehensive National Roadway Safety Strategy, a roadmap to address the national crisis in traffic fatalities and serious injuries. The strategy adopts the safe system approach and builds multiple layers of protection with safer roads, safer people, safer vehicles, safer speeds, and better post-crash care. It is complemented by unprecedented safety funding included in President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.</p> <p>The 2020 crash data report also examines fatality data in key categories, as compared to 2019:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Injured people, including occupants and nonoccupants, down significantly in most categories • Estimated number of police-reported crashes in 2020 decreased by 22% • Fatalities in speeding-related crashes up 17% • Fatalities in alcohol-impaired driving crashes up 14% • Unrestrained passenger vehicle occupant fatalities up 14% • Motorcyclist fatalities up 11% (highest number since first data collection in 1975) • Bicyclist fatalities up 9.2% (highest number since 1987) • Passenger car occupant fatalities up 9% • Fatalities in urban areas up 8.5% • Pedestrian fatalities up 3.9% (highest number since 1989) • Fatalities in hit-and-run crashes up 26% • Fatalities in large-truck crashes down 1.3% <p>Total vehicle miles traveled decreased by 11% in 2020, from 3,261,772 million to 2,903,622 million.</p>
Return to Top	Read the announcement at the Department of Transportation

HEADLINE	03/03 Russia’s invasion changing airspace map
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/airport-aviation-security/russian-invasion-of-ukraine-is-changing-the-global-airspace-map/
GIST	Numerous countries are closing their airspace to Russian aircraft and airlines following the invasion of Ukraine.

The U.S. Department of Transportation and its Federal Aviation Administration is blocking Russian aircraft and airlines from entering and using all domestic U.S. airspace.

“The United States stands with our allies and partners across the world in responding to Putin’s unprovoked aggression against the people of Ukraine,” said U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg on March 2.

The Notice to Air Missions (NOTAM) and regulatory orders suspends the operations of all aircraft owned, certified, operated, registered, chartered, leased, or controlled by, for, or for the benefit of, a person who is a citizen of Russia. This includes passenger and cargo flights, and scheduled as well as charter flights, effectively closing U.S. air space to all Russian commercial air carriers and other Russian civil aircraft.

Russian aircraft were already effectively barred from most U.S. destinations due to bans already imposed by Canada and Europe.

Many airlines, including Delta, American, United and United Parcel Service have also suspended flying over Russian airspace.

International supply chains are taking a hit, with some airlines re-routing flights but many others canceling services that fly over Russian airspace. The greatest disruption is likely to be seen in the Asia-Europe corridor.

Routes over Ukrainian airspace are inevitably affected. The country closed its skies to civilian aircraft on February 24, according to flight tracker Flightradar 24, averting potential tragedy for airline passengers and crew. The Russian assault followed just hours later.

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Council has met to discuss the worsening situation. The Council underscored the paramount importance of preserving the safety and security of international civil aviation and the related obligations of Member States, and in this context, urged the Russian Federation to cease its unlawful activities to ensure the safety and security of civil aviation in all affected areas, and to respect its obligations under the Chicago Convention as well as other relevant international air law treaties. It called upon all concerned parties to seek to resolve the crisis through peaceful dialogue and diplomatic channels.

The Council also recalled with deep sorrow the human suffering that was caused as a result of the downing of flight MH17 in the east of Ukraine on 17 July 2014, and underlined that such a tragedy should never happen again.

In the same context the Council reconfirmed its support to the Safer Skies initiative led by Canada relating to improving international efforts to safeguard civilian flight operations over or in the vicinity of conflict zones.

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HEADLINE	03/03 SPD chief: years to solve staffing crisis
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3377503/spd-chief-diaz-police-staffing-years/
GIST	<p>As concerns continue to mount over public safety in Seattle’s downtown core, interim Police Chief Adrian Diaz’s focus right now is on having as many officers as he can spare patrolling the area. That said, SPD continues to grapple with being short-staffed, and it appears as though that situation likely won’t be resolved any time soon.</p> <p>In early February, Mayor Bruce Harrell announced a so-called “hotspot” patrol initiative, designed to target specific areas of the city experiencing disproportionate crime rates with an influx of police officers. That began with emphasis patrols around 12th Avenue and South Jackson Street, with SPD’s focus now turning to Third Avenue and Pine Street.</p>

“We are now moving all of our resources over to Third and Pine,” Chief Diaz told KIRO Newsradio’s Gee Scott and Ursula Reutin. “Since last night, we have already upstaffed the amount of presence that we will have, we have a mobile precinct that is also going to be in this area, and now we’re working with a variety of different other departments to assist us in bringing resources to the area.”

Amid concerns voiced by business owners over an uptick in crimes, Diaz hopes to establish “a more visible presence” throughout the downtown corridor, in hopes of stabilizing the situation. But with SPD’s staffing at its current level, he also notes this has been “difficult to maintain 24/7.”

To account for that in the near term, the department is pulling officers from each of its precincts and having them walk downtown beats, while exhausting any and all avenues to fill other gaps.

“We’re going to draw from every precinct, we’re going to draw from every bureau,” Diaz described.

“To be clear, we are not transitioning from a Stage 2 mobilization to a higher posture,” Diaz [clarified in a written statement](#). “We are simply re-deploying a small contingent of Officers, Detectives, and Community Service Officers. Overtime related to personnel deployed for these emphasis shifts is approved.”

Meanwhile, Diaz says SPD is still short around 500 officers due to a slew of recent departures and retirements, and closing that gap will likely be a years-long effort.

“We’re committed to making sure that we rebuild this department and that we do hire those 500 officers — we need them,” he said. “We know that we’re going to be hiring 100 officers every year for the next five years, if not longer, just to get us back up to some level of building this department up.”

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HEADLINE	03/04 Markets fall after Russia shelling
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/global-stocks-markets-dow-update-03-04-2022-11646371339?mod=hp_lead_pos2
GIST	<p>U.S. equity futures and global stock indexes fell as concerns mounted about Russia’s intensifying military campaign in Ukraine.</p> <p>News of damage to a major Ukrainian nuclear-power plant rattled already fragile sentiment. Market participants are trying to assess how much the conflict, and tough Western sanctions on Russia, will damage global economic growth and further stoke inflation by disrupting commodity supplies.</p> <p>Futures tied to the Dow Jones Industrial Average, S&P 500 and Nasdaq-100 fell between 0.7% and 0.8%, pointing to declines for U.S. indexes in Friday’s session. In Europe, the pan-continental Stoxx Europe 600 fell 2.4%.</p> <p>Russia’s central bank will keep the Moscow stock market largely closed for a fifth straight day, shielding local shares from a potential selloff. The New York Stock Exchange halted trading in three Russia-linked exchange-traded funds, according to a notice sent early Friday, following a similar move with NYSE-listed Russian stocks earlier this week.</p> <p>The selloff in the Russian ruble stabilized, with the currency down 0.1% against the greenback, according to FactSet, trading at 110.14 per U.S. dollar.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials said Russian shelling caused a fire at a nuclear power plant, intensifying fears about Moscow’s tactics and concerns about a nuclear disaster. However, officials said the fire didn’t affect essential equipment, lessening worries about reactor damage. As of early Friday, the management building at the plant was under the control of Russian forces.</p>

Front-month futures prices for Brent crude oil, the global benchmark, rose 0.1% to \$110.61 a barrel. The U.S. equivalent, West Texas Intermediate crude, added 1.3% to \$109.05 a barrel. In the previous session, WTI briefly topped \$116 for the first time since 2008.

In bond markets, the yield on the benchmark 10-year U.S. Treasury note declined to 1.778%, down from 1.843% Thursday. Bond yields decline as prices rise.

Stocks in New York have been relatively resilient amid the conflict. All three major U.S. indexes are up 2% or more since Russia invaded Ukraine last week. Yet trading has grown choppy in recent days. All three indexes are on pace for weekly declines of between 0.5% and 1.1%.

Investors were cheered this week when Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said he would propose a quarter-percentage point interest-rate increase at the central bank's coming meeting, alleviating concerns about a steeper hike. However, Mr. Powell also warned Thursday that the conflict in Ukraine [would likely push up inflation](#).

The worsening situation in Ukraine is driving investors to trim risk exposure ahead of the weekend, said Kenny Wen, wealth management strategist at [Everbright Securities International](#) in Hong Kong.

Mr. Wen said investors were "worried about inflation and worried about the global economy." He added: "If oil prices go up significantly, just like the 1970s, the global economy could go into recession, which will hurt corporate profits. Then the impact will be long-lasting."

Asian stocks dropped, in part reflecting [Thursday's action](#) on Wall Street, where technology stocks sold off more than the broader market and U.S.-listed Chinese companies stumbled.

Japan's Nikkei 225 closed 2.2% lower Friday. Hong Kong's benchmark [Hang Seng](#) Index fell 2.5%, registering its lowest close since March 2020. Tech-related stocks were among the heaviest hit, with Japan's [SoftBank Group](#) falling 4.8%, while in Hong Kong, [Tencent Holdings](#) fell 3.7% and food-delivery giant [Meituan](#) retreated 5.4%.

In mainland China, the CSI 300 index that tracks large shares listed in either Shenzhen or Shanghai fell 1.2%, for its lowest close since July 2020.

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HEADLINE	03/04 Tech reopening, new ways to work, gather
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/tech-companies-reopen-their-offices-facebook-google-11646365155?mod=hp_lead_pos4
GIST	<p>Tech companies are inching closer to reopening their offices, but it's clear the way they work will never be the same.</p> <p>It was two years ago this past week that Alphabet Inc., Facebook Inc. FB -and Amazon.com Inc. campuses on the West Coast began emptying out as the coronavirus started spreading across the U.S., a move that was quickly mirrored by the vast majority of offices nationwide.</p> <p>Today, many skilled knowledge workers have no interest in going back to the way things used to be. In their constant quest for new talent, tech firms—and old-guard companies that need to find more tech-savvy talent—will do what it takes to hire and retain people who feel empowered to demand the schedule and location of their choice.</p> <p>Even when the pandemic is over, many tech leaders believe work flexibility will be a staple, hiring will be more geographically dispersed and people will spend their time differently than they did before, with designated hours they're available to collaborate with colleagues and other periods where individual work is the priority.</p>

“Our sense of place has been permanently disrupted,” says Annie Dean, who was head of remote work for Facebook earlier in the pandemic and is now at software developer [Atlassian](#) Corp. , where her title is vice president of team anywhere. She predicts that bosses who force staffers back to offices in rigid ways will lose credibility with their workforces. “That’s just not going to be the way that we go forward.”

Alphabet’s Google this past week outlined [its return-to-work plans](#): Employees will be returning to the office a few days a week starting in early April. But Alphabet Chief Executive Sundar Pichai [told The Wall Street Journal last month](#) that the future of work is flexible and that he sees it as a “new canvas on which we can develop newer ways, which make people’s work life more fulfilling and their personal lives more fulfilling.”

[Twitter](#) Inc., which was among the first to announce it would allow its employees to work from anywhere permanently, announced Thursday that it plans to start reopening its offices March 15. But in making the announcement, CEO Parag Agrawal, stressed that the company’s ultimate return-to-work philosophy is employee choice.

“Wherever you feel most productive and creative is where you will work and that includes working from home full-time forever. Office every day? That works too. Some days in office, some days from home? Of course,” Mr. Agrawal [told employees](#).

Perhaps one of the most lasting ways Covid has altered the workscape is hiring, as evidenced by a recent Twitter thread where several high-profile executives chimed in.

“The place to be was Silicon Valley. It feels like now [the place to be is the internet](#),” tweeted Brian Chesky, chief executive of [Airbnb](#) Inc.

The head of [Coinbase Global](#) Inc., Brian Armstrong, said Silicon Valley had already relocated from California to the cloud. Eighty-nine percent of new hires at the cryptocurrency exchange were somewhere other than the West Coast in the most recent quarter, he tweeted, up from 30% before the pandemic.

Alyssa Henry, the head of the [Square](#) business within the newly renamed Block Inc., [tweeted](#) that 40% of managers on her team don’t have any direct reports living in the same location. “Distributed and asynchronous work is the now and the future,” she said.

The tech industry isn’t the only one undertaking far-flung recruiting efforts these days. [General Motors](#) Co. said this year it plans to hire 8,000 high-tech employees, many of them based far from its Detroit headquarters—some in offices in places like Austin, Texas, and some working from home.

“It’s just not limiting us to our backyard,” says Kyle Lagunas, GM’s head of talent. He took the job at the auto maker last year helping to oversee hiring, in part, because it allowed him to continue living in Massachusetts. “I am never moving to Detroit,” he said.

New Ways to Work

Where people work directly impacts how people work. Once teams scattered in the Covid era and started performing their roles from all over the country, tech companies explored ways for them to balance collaboration time with colleagues with focused time for individual work.

Enter “asynchronous” work, where employees get to set their hours in part by what schedule best suits their lives. Slack Technologies Inc. has “core hours” where team members are supposed to be available to jump on a call or huddle with their teams. Slack parent Salesforce Inc. encourages employees to set their Slack status to “focus time” when they’re handling individual work or “connecting,” to signal their availability to collaborate.

Salesforce recently tried its first “Async Week,” where 20,000 of its nearly 70,000 employees canceled routine meetings to make more time for solo work, said Carolyn Guss, a spokeswoman. Of those who

participated in the experiment, 72% said it made them more productive and 70% reported it made them less stressed. Two more async weeks are planned for this year.

Twitter is adopting a similar approach where teams come up with common hours that work for them to collaborate. It also recently experimented with a companywide “focus” week where the majority of meetings were canceled and people could catch up on things like backlogged assignments.

“We had a very meeting-heavy culture,” said Megan Gleeson, Twitter’s vice president of career experience. “We started to see the number of meetings tick up throughout the pandemic so that people could find connection.”

Now Twitter encourages workers to think about “meeting hygiene,” which could involve setting a tight agenda for efficiency, recording the meeting so people who can’t join can still listen at a later time, and considering whether the meeting [really needs to happen at all](#), Ms. Gleeson said.

There’s still a lot for companies to iron out to make asynchronous models run smoothly, Ms. Dean, the former head of remote work at Facebook, said. The biggest challenge to sort: “This huge collaboration tax,” she added.

Workers can’t [string together enough hours in a row](#) to focus, so they sometimes work [well beyond the traditional 9-to-5 schedule](#), with [pings and dings](#) signaling requests coming to them from all over the internet. Going forward, Ms. Dean predicts savvy employers will help people shrink their online time.

“There won’t be the expectation that you need to be online 10 for hours a day, available to other people,” she said.

Instead, teams will do more front-end planning for projects and then send team members off with tasks and deadlines. For some, hybrid models can work where people come in on set days of the week, while other teams might need to work from an office for five days, two weeks in a row, to pound out a plan for a project; then they could work from home for several weeks as they deliver that project, with online check-ins in the meantime.

New Ways to Gather

Tech companies spent years selling their lavish office campuses full of perks like on-site massages, free food and exercise classes as prime reasons to come work for them. Even though most workers will only go back part time, these spaces will [still serve an important purpose](#), several companies say.

The tech sector accounted for 37% of the total square footage of the top 100 office leases signed last year, exceeding its 2019 percentage of 32%, according to a new report from [CBRE](#), a commercial real-estate company that owns and leases office buildings.

Meta Platforms Inc., the parent company of Facebook, last year signed a lease on Austin’s Sixth Street, adding another 589,000 feet of square footage to its existing office space in the city. Meta currently has 2,000 employees living in Austin and another 500 job openings there, according to Katherine Shappley, head of the company’s Austin office. The company also expanded its office space during the pandemic in New York, Boston, Chicago and Bellevue, Wash., where there are deep pools of tech talent.

But today’s tech offices look different. [Dropbox](#) doesn’t call its spaces “offices” anymore. Instead, [it calls them “studios”](#); there are fewer desks and more meeting rooms and lounges for less formal team gatherings.

Google is running a series of pilot programs in the Bay Area, New York City, Dublin, London and Singapore to reconfigure some office layouts to boost productivity and connectedness. The company said it plans to see how those experiments go before scaling them.

	<p>More companies are holding off-site meetings at hotels, coffee shops or executives' backyards the new way to gather groups instead of pulling them into traditional offices. Salesforce has said its existing offices will be used for more collaboration and less individual work, but it's going a step further with an off-site project that combines work and wellness. Salesforce is bringing 10,000 employees to an employee retreat outside of Santa Cruz, Calif., this year, where workers will meet for training and bonding with their colleagues, in addition to hiking, yoga and cooking classes.</p> <p>The pandemic has ripped down the boundaries between employees' personal and professional lives, and many executives say workers' mental health and wellness concerns will continue to bleed into their workdays.</p> <p>Conversations that may have once taken place with friends outside of the office now feel natural among colleagues, who have grown accustomed to supporting their peers during the pandemic, said Francine Katsoudas, chief people, policy and purpose officer at networking giant Cisco Systems Inc. She says it will continue to be more acceptable for employees to talk about their mental health and the state of their personal lives at work—and to expect support from their bosses when they do.</p> <p>“We’re moving into a world now where leaders have to be so aware of every employee individually, what they need and how they work best,” Ms. Katsoudas said. “So there isn’t a one size fits all with work.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Iran, US close to reviving nuclear deal
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-n-report-shows-iran-has-almost-enough-highly-enriched-uranium-for-a-nuclear-bomb-11646316141?mod=hp_listc_pos1
GIST	<p>VIENNA—The U.S. and Iran on Thursday were closing in on an agreement to restore the 2015 nuclear deal, although officials from both countries warned final issues still needed to be nailed down in the coming hours.</p> <p>After weeks of intense negotiations in Vienna involving the U.S. and Iran, and Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China, senior diplomats said they were now within reach of an agreement that would restore the 2015 deal. That pact lifted most international sanctions on Tehran in exchange for strict but temporary restrictions on Iran's nuclear work.</p> <p>“We are very close to an agreement,” chief British negotiator Stephanie Al-Qaq said on Twitter late Thursday. “Now we have to take a few final steps.”</p> <p>U.S. and Iranian officials cautioned there was at least one big issue that still needed solving: Iran has been pushing for more sanctions relief if the nuclear deal is restored. In particular, it wants the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to be taken off Washington's most significant terror sanctions list, the Foreign Terrorist Organization.</p> <p>The U.S. has long pushed back against the demand given the Revolutionary Guard's role across the Middle East backing designated terrorist groups such as Lebanon's Hezbollah. A final decision would almost certainly need to be cleared at the highest levels in the Biden administration.</p> <p>However, it is almost certain under any restored nuclear deal that the Biden administration will lift sanctions on dozens of terrorist-listed people and entities, a move that is already sparking criticism in Washington.</p> <p>Iranian officials also cautioned that talks hadn't crossed the finish line.</p> <p>“Nobody can say the deal is done until all the outstanding remaining issues are resolved,” said Saeed Khatibzadeh, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Twitter. “Extra efforts needed.”</p>

The U.S. left the nuclear deal in 2018, with former President Donald Trump saying it did too little to stop Iran's pathway to a nuclear weapons. Since 2019, Iran has expanded its nuclear work. On Thursday, the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency said Iran had doubled its stockpile of highly enriched uranium, leaving the country close to amassing enough weapons-grade nuclear fuel for a bomb.

The Vienna talks have focused on agreeing on the steps Tehran and Washington would need to take to restore the pact.

European and U.S. diplomats have said a deal needs to be wrapped up in the next few days or they will exit the negotiations. Time is running short, they say, because Iran's nuclear advances mean it could soon be impossible to recapture the main benefit of the deal for the West, Russia and China—keeping Iran far enough away from having enough nuclear material for the bomb.

Under a restored deal, Iran's "breakout time"—the duration needed to amass enough nuclear fuel or a bomb—could be as little as six months, U.S. officials say, compared with around 12 months when the original deal came into force in January 2016.

A first sign that negotiations were advancing came Thursday morning when the IAEA said its Director General Rafael Grossi would travel to Tehran for talks to resolve one of the final issues standing in the way of a deal.

Mr. Grossi is seeking an agreement with Iranian senior officials about how to handle a probe into undeclared nuclear material found in Iran. Iranian officials say they want to eliminate that investigation as part of a deal to revive the nuclear pact, something that Mr. Grossi and Western officials have said is unacceptable.

The IAEA is considering some kind of road map, Western diplomats said, which could offer Iran reassurance the investigation won't be open-ended if Iran steps up its cooperation in answering the agency's questions about its nuclear work.

Iran wants the probe closed, Iranian and Western officials say, because the IAEA could censure Tehran if it doesn't cooperate and that could open the way for the issue to be sent up to the U.N. Security Council, where international sanctions could be imposed.

Ahead of Mr. Grossi's trip to Iran, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett called him to press his government's concerns about the nuclear deal and its position that the nuclear probe be continued. They agreed to speak again after the Tehran trip and Mr. Grossi will be visiting Israel in the near future, a senior Israeli official said.

By Thursday evening, European negotiators were posting on social media pictures of their teams at Vienna's plush Palais Coburg hotel where the talks take place, with messages of thanks for the hard work.

Early this week, talks grew tense after Iran's top negotiator returned from his capital and put back on the table demands that Tehran had previously made. They included demands for guarantees that if the U.S. quits the deal again, Iran's contracts with Western firms won't be ripped up.

The U.S. and Europeans have said repeatedly that they can't offer guarantees about what a future U.S. administration would do. By Wednesday evening, Western diplomats said Iran seemed no longer to be pressing the issue so strongly.

Failure to reach a deal could lead Iran to move closer to nuclear weapons capabilities although Tehran has always said its nuclear program is for purely peaceful purposes.

Western officials don't believe Iran has fully mastered building a nuclear warhead or fixing it to a missile.

However on Thursday in a confidential report circulated to members, the IAEA reported that as of Feb. 19, Iran has 33.2 kilograms of 60% enriched material, up from 17.7 kilograms in early November when the agency last reported. It is the most highly enriched uranium ever recorded for Iran.

Iran would need around 40 kilograms of 60% enriched uranium to produce enough weapons-grade nuclear fuel for a weapon.

Under a restored nuclear deal, Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium would be capped at 202.8 kilograms until 2031, with enrichment levels limited to 3.67%.

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HEADLINE	03/03 France president: 'worst is yet to come'
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/03/macron-putin-call-ukraine/
GIST	<p>PARIS — Russian President Vladimir Putin called French President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday, in what appeared to have been a markedly more tense exchange than previous conversations between the two leaders.</p> <p>The 90-minute call failed to deliver a diplomatic breakthrough, and a senior French official said it left Macron convinced that “the worst is yet to come” and that Putin aims to take control of all of Ukraine.</p> <p>“Your country will pay dearly because it will end up as an isolated country, weakened and under sanctions for a very long time,” Macron told Putin, according to a French official, who added that Macron “called on Vladimir Putin to not lie to himself.”</p> <p>The conversation, which the French presidency said was initiated by Putin, came as Ukrainian officials were set to hold talks with a Russian delegation, according to Russian and Ukrainian officials. But based on the two leaders’ exchange, there was no indication Thursday that a diplomatic solution could be in sight.</p> <p>“At this point, [Putin] refuses to cease his attacks on Ukraine,” Macron wrote on Twitter later Thursday.</p> <p>The Kremlin’s news service cited Putin as having told Macron that the objectives “of the special military operation” — the term the Kremlin has used to refer to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine — “will be fulfilled in any case.”</p> <p>“Attempts to gain time by dragging negotiations will only lead to additional requirements for Kyiv in our negotiating position,” Putin told Macron, according to the readout.</p> <p>A senior French official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because it is French government practice, said Putin’s remarks reflected a “determination to continue the military operation and to continue it to the end.”</p> <p>According to the Kremlin’s news service, Putin also took issue with an address to the nation Macron had given Wednesday, in which he had condemned Putin’s “brutal attack” on Ukraine and said that “Putin chose the war.”</p> <p>In his speech, Macron had also said Putin’s claims that he wants to “denazify” Ukraine are “a lie” and “an insult to the history of Russia and Ukraine, to the memory of our elders who fought side by side against Nazism.”</p> <p>Responding directly to those comments Thursday, the Kremlin news service said Putin disagreed “with many points” raised in Macron’s address, and he denied that Russia was behind the shelling of major Ukrainian cities — despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.</p>

	<p>Macron is the only Western leader who has been in consistent public contact with Putin since the invasion of Ukraine, in an effort the French presidency has described as an attempt to keep the doors to meaningful negotiations open. Putin and Macron also spoke Monday and last Thursday.</p> <p>Before the invasion, Macron had led Western efforts to prevent an escalation of the crisis through diplomatic channels, traveling to Moscow last month to keep Putin engaged. Since mid-December, the two leaders have spoken over a dozen times, according to the French presidency. Macron has also been in frequent contact with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky — the most recent time on Thursday, following his call with Putin.</p> <p>“Maintaining dialogue to avoid human tragedies is absolutely necessary,” Macron tweeted Thursday. “I will continue my efforts and outreach. We must avoid the worst.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 ‘Freedom convoy’ spinoff heads to DC
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/03/03/dc-peoples-convoy-beltway-protest/
GIST	<p>The U.S. protesters inspired by the self-styled “Freedom Convoy” that occupied downtown Ottawa for weeks headed out from Southern California last week for a cross-country trip to the D.C. region. They plan to arrive this weekend, and Virginia State Police describes the convoy as a “still-fluid situation.” Here’s what is happening:</p> <p>What is the ‘People’s Convoy,’ and when is it coming? The People’s Convoy, a U.S.-based group of activists opposed to vaccine mandates, is on a cross-country trip aiming to arrive in Hagerstown, Md., on Friday before targeting the D.C. Beltway area on Saturday. Washington County Public Schools in Hagerstown announced that students would be dismissed 2½ hours early on Friday because of expected traffic congestion caused by the convoy.</p> <p>How large is the convoy? Despite organizers touting numbers in the thousands, Capt. Ron Galaviz, a spokesman for the Indiana State Police, said the convoy consisted of fewer than 300 vehicles when it arrived in Indiana this week — and a majority were passenger vehicles, not large trucks.</p> <p>By the time the convoy left and headed toward Ohio on Thursday, Galaviz estimated there were about 550 vehicles, mostly cars or pickups but also about 160 semi tractors or tractor-trailers. Those estimates are consistent with what Ohio State Highway Patrol authorities are seeing as the convoy heads to Lore City, Ohio, said Sgt. Brice Nihiser.</p> <p>Supporters have been joining and leaving throughout the trip, making it difficult for officials to predict the size of the group before it reaches a given region.</p> <p>“People would reach a destination point and decide, ‘Okay, I’m far enough’ and go home, and then more would join along the way,” Sgt. Christopher Watson, a spokesman for the Illinois State Police, said of the convoy that traveled through his state earlier this week. “It varied widely, and so we had to adapt on the fly quite a bit.”</p> <p>The convoy is on Day 9 of its 11-day journey, traveling from Monrovia, Ind., to Lore City, Ohio. Supporters from other states, including in the Northeast region, have posted their own routes on social media in hopes of meeting up with the group when it arrives in the Washington area.</p> <p>Social media posts showed people waving American flags on the side of a highway for a Northeast contingent of People’s Convoy drivers coming through Pennsylvania. But Pennsylvania Department of Transportation officials monitoring traffic did not notice anything unusual throughout the day, said Fritz Schreffler, an agency spokeswoman.</p>

There was about a mile of vehicles driving south on Interstate 81, approaching Franklin County, Pa., on Thursday night, which Schreffler estimated may be the convoy.

What will they do when they get here?

Organizers have emphasized that they have no plans to go into D.C., but they have not publicized what they will do when they arrive or how long they will stay. Organizers say they are on a “peaceful and law-abiding transcontinental journey.”

What are they protesting?

Throughout the cross-country trip, People’s Convoy organizers have rallied people by calling pandemic restrictions and mandates an infringement on their freedoms, even as many of those measures at the federal and local levels have been blocked or rescinded.

Brian Brase, a convoy organizer, said the group wants an end to the national emergency declaration in response to the coronavirus — first [issued by President Donald Trump](#) in March 2020 and later [extended by President Biden](#) — and for Congress to hold hearings investigating the government’s response to the pandemic.

Still, this movement in the United States, like [the Ottawa protests](#), appears fueled by far-right extremists and conspiracy theorists, extremism researchers said. The convoy demonstrators’ hostility toward the vaccine mandates is just one of several anti-government, far-right beliefs held by people in this broader movement, they said. .

Organizers disagree with that characterization and have tried to frame the convoy as bipartisan. But speeches, rallies and flags are full of pro-Trump and anti-Biden rhetoric.

How is the region preparing?

The possibility of a caravan of trucks and cars has heightened security, drawing in police agencies from Maryland and Virginia to monitor the Beltway.

D.C. police spokesman Dustin Sternbeck said the department’s posture has not changed since additional security was ramped up in the days ahead of Tuesday’s State of the Union address, and the Civil Disturbance Unit remains activated as a precautionary measure.

Police officers from New York City, who came to assist U.S. Capitol police for the State of the Union, remain in the District, a spokesman for that agency said. He would not say when they are scheduled to depart.

Sternbeck said D.C. officers remain stationed along highway entrances to the District and some exit ramps, along with trucks from the Department of Public Works, in case roadways need to be blocked or traffic diverted.

Police declined to say specifically what they might do should the convoy try to enter the District. “It is fair to say we would explore all mitigation options,” Sternbeck said.

Authorities note that large trucks are barred from many D.C. streets, with regulations restricting where they can park and how long they can idle.

Virginia State Police said they are monitoring and preparing for “potential commercial and passenger vehicle convoys affecting traffic” this weekend, calling it a “still-fluid situation.” As they prepare for this weekend, the agency said in a statement that people can expect to see a larger presence of Virginia troopers and other safety teams. Maryland State Police also said the agency is working with regional authorities to monitor the situation.

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SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/03/03/march-cold-blast-us-arctic/
GIST	<p>Whether you live in Wichita, Kansas, or Washington, D.C., don't put away your winter coats. Although the forecast into early next week is mostly springlike, consecutive cold fronts are set to surge across the Lower 48 in the next one to two weeks.</p> <p>The first, gentle front will dive into the Central States this weekend before pushing off the East Coast by Wednesday. But the more bitter Arctic blast is projected to drop into north central United States in about seven days, probably reaching the East Coast around the weekend of March 12-13.</p> <p>The cold will come as somewhat of a shock as record warmth is predicted to precede the onset of the chillier weather pattern in a number of areas this weekend into early next week.</p> <p>On Saturday, abnormally warm temperatures will span the Central States with highs from 65 to 70 degrees stretching from Des Moines to Pittsburgh. By Sunday, the warmth will edge eastward, with high near 70 as far north as Columbus and Philadelphia and record-challenging highs at or above 80 in many parts of the Southeast. On Monday, highs near 80 could creep as far north as Richmond and even Washington.</p> <p>“[D]ozens of daily record high minimum and maximum temperatures could be set,” the National Weather Service writes in its extended forecast discussion.</p> <p>After the first of the two cold fronts pushes through the eastern U.S. Tuesday, temperatures will return closer to seasonal norms by Wednesday as the more significant blast of cold, sourced from the Arctic, drops into Montana.</p> <p>By late on March 10, or in about one week, frigid air is projected to have penetrated through the Rockies and as far south as the Texas Panhandle. The cold will then probably sweep through the Midwest and western Great Lakes by March 11 with temperatures 30 degrees below normal in some areas. This could mean highs only in the teens and single digits with subzero lows.</p> <p>Over the weekend of March 12-13, the core of the cold will sweep over the eastern Great Lakes, Ohio and Tennessee valleys, Mid-Atlantic and Northeast. Even the Southeast will probably see temperatures drop sharply. Places that had highs in the 70s and 80s this weekend may only be in the 30s and 40s that weekend, with freezing overnight lows.</p> <p>As the cold air arrives late next week, it could be accompanied by snow, particularly in parts of the Upper Midwest, Great Lakes and interior Northeast.</p> <p>Exactly how cold it gets at particular locations, the timing of its arrival and associated snow amounts still need to come into focus; sometimes models overpredict the intensity of cold snaps at long time ranges. However, there is a strong model agreement that an Arctic front will enter the eastern two-thirds of the Lower 48 late next week and bring widespread below normal temperatures.</p> <p>The National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center's 8- to 14-day temperature outlook shows a high likelihood of below normal temperatures between March 11 and 17 over the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes. We would expect the zone of below normal temperatures to shift east when the outlook is updated to cover the period of March 12 to 18.</p> <p>In the wake of the blast of cold — ending around March 15 — longer range models do indicate temperatures should moderate back to near normal levels later that week. Through the end of the month, models advertise a bumpy pattern with frequent swings in temperatures although probably not of the magnitude that we'll see over the next 10 days.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Ukrainian women fighting against Russia
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/gjbndg/ukrainian-women-soldiers-russia

Kristina had been living with her family in Italy for over a decade, working at the supermarket and singing at weddings in her spare time. But as military tensions rose a year ago along Ukraine's eastern border, the 29-year-old Ukrainian woman returned to her country of birth to become a soldier.

She was fully aware of the danger she was getting herself into—since 2014, Ukraine has been the target of Russian-backed aggression in its eastern region of Donbas.

“The risk of saying goodbye to life is always there. We are not afraid of death; we are afraid to be slaves,” Kristina, who withheld her last name and location due to safety concerns, told VICE World News. “I will be on my land to the last.”

The decisions of Ukrainian women like Kristina to pick up arms to defend the country from Russian threats helped give rise to a military that has a higher share of women than most other armed forces in the world.

At the beginning of 2021, there were around 57,000 women in Ukraine's armed forces, comprising [22.8 percent](#) of the total, according to the ministry of defence. This figure is far higher than those of its neighbors Poland (7.5 percent) and Russia (4 percent), as well as the United States (16 percent) and Germany (12 percent). Only a handful of countries that conscript men and women on equal conditions, such as Norway and Sweden, have a comparable or higher level of female representation in their military.

As Russia continues its attacks on Ukraine, the responsibility of defending the country has fallen in part to the growing ranks of formal—and informal—female fighters. Among them have been a [79-year-old woman](#) who recently learned how to fire a gun, former beauty queen [Anastasiia Lenna](#), who represented Ukraine at the 2015 Miss Grand International pageant—and Kristina, the former wedding singer.

Despite being the only woman in her mountain combat unit, Kristina said that she does “everything on an equal footing with men.”

“They treat me first and foremost as a military woman, as a friend, as a sister,” she said.

Since President Vladimir Putin invaded his neighbor on Feb. 24, women have been prominent among Ukrainian civilians fighting Russian forces, from [making Molotov cocktails](#) to [dismantling road signs](#).

Their role in Ukraine's resistance can be traced to the Maidan protests in 2013, where a wave of mass demonstrations resulted in the ousting of Ukraine's Russia-aligned president Viktor Yanukovich.

During the protests, which were vehemently opposed by the Russian government, women helped out in makeshift hospitals and joined self-defense units. That year, the military began to see a major uptick in the number of women joining—a figure that [more than doubled](#) in the six years to 2020.

“[These women] reveal that Ukrainian society will do everything to protect its freedom and sovereignty,” said Olesya Khromeychuk, the director of Ukrainian Institute London, a charity organization and center for educational activities related to Ukraine.

When Moscow annexed Crimea and backed separatists in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region in 2014, many women simply replicated the roles they were engaged in during the protests—but this time in the armed forces, Khromeychuk said.

Initially, women were not allowed to take up combat positions, though some still found a way [around legal restrictions](#). Over the years, reports have emerged of [gender-based discrimination](#), as well as [allegations of sexual harassment](#) in the army.

But in 2018, the passage of a [military gender equality law](#) granted women equal rights as men in the army, giving rise to a profound societal shift, Khromeychuk noted.

“Servicewomen who joined the war effort did much to challenge the traditional perceptions of gender roles prevalent in Ukraine,” said Khromeychuk. “Servicewomen started to be perceived not as women first and foremost but as professionals who chose to join the military.”

This number could rise further in the wake of the invasion. As of last December, an update to Ministry of Defence regulations required women between 18 and 60 deemed fit for military service [to register](#) with the armed forces so that they could be mobilized during war.

“Considering more than 122,000 Russian troops are at our borders, the decision seems logical, timely, and sensible,” Oleksandra Ustinova, a member of the Ukrainian parliament, [told](#) reporters at that time.

In February, Ukrainian authorities announced that they were looking to recruit [over 1.5 million civilians](#) into the Territorial Defense Force, a military reserve branch comprising civilian reservists. Last year, Yevheniia Chekh decided it was her national duty to join such a unit.

A year ago, she was a beautician living in the Poltava region in central Ukraine. Now, she’s also a member of her local reservist unit. Volunteers like Chekh are known as [“weekend warriors,”](#) people who hold civilian jobs but take part in military drills and who can be called upon to support the armed forces in resisting invaders.

Prior to the invasion, Chekh had been spending her Saturdays at military exercises, and with no prior sporting history, her experience has been an arduous one. But the 46-year-old told VICE World News that she had “no fears and hesitations” about going into combat.

“Now all of Ukraine and Ukrainians are at war with the Russian army,” she said. “I feel determined and confident, without fear and pity for the enemy.”

“I have a family. I am worried not only about them, but also about all citizens.”

But the fact remains that recruits like Chekh, those with no previous military experience, are an imperfect solution to the current crisis. In a video that went viral over the weekend, former Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko speaks in a live television interview while behind him, a soldier accidentally drops his rifle magazine. The soldier’s awkward mistake became an instant meme, sparking laughter and then sympathy.

While it’s unclear if the man was a professional soldier or new recruit, commenters took him to represent the many Ukrainian civilians, including women, who have assumed military duties amid a chaotic Russian invasion.

“The fact that civilians feel that they have little option but to take up arms is evidence of the international community’s failure to protect Ukraine against Russia’s attack adequately,” Khromeychuk said.

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HEADLINE	03/03 World’s second largest Ukrainian diaspora
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/03/canada-ukraine-diaspora-relief-efforts-russia-attack
GIST	<p>Every weekend for most of her youth, while other children were out playing, Natalia Toroshenko attended Ukrainian school, studying the country’s geography, language, its history and national heroes.</p> <p>“Ukraine, and being Ukrainian, is a deep part of me,” she said. “I wasn’t born there, but it’s my ancestral homeland.”</p> <p>Toroshenko grew up in Montreal, thousands of kilometres away from the country her father had left to flee famine and conflict. But, she like many other Ukrainian Canadians, has maintained strong connections to the country – and watched horrified as family and friends are trapped in war.</p> <p>People rally outside the Ukrainian consulate in Toronto.</p>

Canada is home to 1.4 million people of Ukrainian descent – the world’s second largest Ukrainian diaspora after Russia. Tens of thousands of Ukrainians farmed the country’s west. The spires of their churches still dot rural landscapes and large cities. Prominent community leaders and politicians are of Ukrainian ancestry, including Canada’s deputy prime minister, Chrystia Freeland.

Those cultural and political ties are particularly prominent in the Canadian Prairies, where generations of Ukrainians have braided their culture and history into the vast landscape.

In the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, hundreds of one room schoolhouses were once named after Ukrainian figures and communities. Nearly 30 towns and a handful of parks are named after places and people from Ukraine.

Vegreville, Alberta, where Toroshenko now lives, boasts one of the world’s largest pysankas – an intricately painted Ukrainian Easter egg weighing more than 5,500 pounds and drawing thousands of curious tourists each year.

In recent weeks, a sombre mood has taken hold in the farming community .

“Each morning on television I watch Kyiv getting bombed all over the place. I see images of Ukrainians taking up arms. Regular people, as young as 18, defending their country,” Toroshenko said. “It’s horrific.”

As Ukrainian-Canadians pore over news accounts and social media the Russian invasion has also unearthed painful memories of their own family histories – many of which are marked by conflict, dispossession and exile.

“My father chose to come here for a better life,” she said. “He wanted a place where he could be free and where if he worked hard, he and others could make something of themselves.”

That history inspired Toroshenko to return the favor to her family’s homeland, traveling ten times to Ukraine as an elections observer. But as the war continues, she fears the democratic structures she and thousands of others helped establish over the years are under threat of collapse – as is the dream of what Ukraine could become.

Canada’s deputy prime minister Chrystia Freeland, who grew up in a tight-knit rural Ukrainian community in the Prairies, spoke last week to the country’s diaspora, offering words of hope.

“When she spoke, she used the first line of the national anthem. She said ‘Ukraine has not yet perished,’ said Toroshenko. “It was amazing to hear. It really resonated with us. It moved us.”

Others have tried to shake off the sense of powerlessness, drawing instead on the tightness of the community.

“Immigrating to Canada was hard for us, as it is for most people. But to be able to see ourselves in the Ukrainians who came before us was an inspiration. It showed us there was a place for us here – and a path for us to follow,” said Zoya Kostetsky, a Winnipeg-based artisan who moved from to Canada from the Ukrainian city of Lviv in 2005.

She attended one of the ten English-Ukrainian bilingual schools in the province and found a strong cultural network to help her settle in Canada: “We found a sense of community. They spoke the language, they followed the same traditions and celebrated the same holidays.”

As she stood with her family at a recent rally against the war, she was struck by how the grief she felt was shared across the crowd.

“Everyone was suffering. Everyone had someone they were worried about. And in a grim way, it made it easier.”

Desperate to help in some way, she organized a raffle with prizes from local businesses, and raised more than C\$20,000 to aid in relief efforts.

But the knowledge that if her family hadn't left, they too would be facing the prospect of fighting in the war has left a heavy mark on her.

"My dad is still young enough to be in the military, so he would be in the war. I would be in the war. My mom is a medic, so she would be doing medical work in the war. My brother would be in the war," she said. "Our whole family would be fighting on the frontlines."

The funds she has raised have gone to help both citizens fighting and those fleeing to neighboring countries, and Kostetsky said the gratitude from aid groups in Ukraine – and the overwhelming support of the broader community around her, have kept her motivated.

"I'll keep doing what I can every day until this is over," she said. "Because until then I won't be able to relax at all. I can't just sit back and watch as this country gets destroyed."

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HEADLINE	03/03 Russians flee; escape war consequences
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/03/people-leaving-russia-ukraine-war
GIST	<p>Alexei Trubetskoy knew he had to get out the moment he woke up and looked at his phone on the morning of Russia's invasion into Ukraine.</p> <p>"I got up, checked the news in disbelief and realized I had to leave as soon as I can," he said.</p> <p>Trubetskoy, who runs an English language school in Moscow, bought a ticket to Sri Lanka on the same day.</p> <p>"It was clear to me that the horrible invasion will change Russia forever."</p> <p>A growing number of Russians have decided to leave their country following Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine, fearing the economic and political consequences the move will have.</p> <p>"I hope to return to the country I love, but it is completely unclear what will happen next. My future is taken away from me, the country won't be the same," Trubetskoy said.</p> <p>Russia has already seen a major crackdown on those opposing the invasion.</p> <p>More than 7,500 people have so far been detained at anti-war protests across the country, according to the independent monitoring site OVD-Info. A number of the country's independent news outlets have also been forced to shut down.</p> <p>But those who leave are also fearful of the economic uncertainties that the country now faces: the Russian rouble and financial markets crashed this week after the West implemented crippling sanctions, and Moscow has also seen a mass exodus of western companies, including Ikea, Apple and Nike.</p> <p>Google analytics showed that the word "emigration" saw a spike in searches over the last week while countless Telegram channels have been set up in which worried Russians are discussing ways to leave the country.</p> <p>Andrei Kolesnikov, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment, said it was expected that the country would see an exodus of its "quality working force" who will sense there is "no future" for them in Russia.</p>

“This exodus will mean the degradation of the nation. The country doesn’t have a very large pool of talented people. Without them, Russia can’t develop itself,” Kolesnikov said

The exodus has been fuelled by [rumours that authorities could declare martial law as soon as Friday](#), when the federation council, Russia’s upper house of parliament, is due to hold an unscheduled meeting.

Such a move would be unprecedented in modern Russian history and could involve mass mobilization of the male population as well as the closure of borders, according to an official document describing the law.

“I got my family together after a friend at the ‘top’ called me about this martial law thing. We booked the first plane available on Tuesday and flew to a random country I have never been before,” said Anton, a senior manager at a major Russian oil and gas firm. “I am not planning to fight in this war that wasn’t my decision to begin with.”

Tatyana Stanovaya, a prominent Russian political analyst and founder of R.Politik, on Wednesday evening [tweeted](#) that introducing a martial law could be a “logical scenario”.

“The proclamation of martial law will allow the authorities to introduce military censorship, to increase the secrecy of the state’s activities and the actions of local bodies.”

The last time the federation council called an unscheduled meeting was February 22, when the body approved Vladimir Putin’s request to use military force outside the country, two days before the invasion of Ukraine. The federation council said it will officially meet to discuss a package of anti-crisis measures in response to western sanctions.

In a briefing with reporters on Thursday, the Kremlin spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, dismissed speculation about the introduction of martial law. A senior source working at one of the three major airports in Moscow also said he believed it was “unlikely” that the borders would close.

“We haven’t been informed about anything. I think it is unlikely. At the same time we are in a war, so let’s see,” the source said.

But as speculation mounted, a feverish mood was felt in Moscow on Thursday.

Those seeking to leave faced a severe lack of available flights after western countries closed their airspace to Russian airlines. Moscow has also closed its airspace to much of the west in response.

Flights to Yerevan, Istanbul and Belgrade were completely sold out for the coming days while a one-way ticket to Dubai was priced at over £3,000 (\$4,006) – compared with £250 (\$334) in ordinary times – according to the flight aggregator Skyscanner. Train tickets from St Petersburg to Helsinki were also sold out on Thursday and Friday.

Some men who left earlier this week said they were extensively questioned at the Russian border.

Andrei, a Moscow-based cinema director, said he was held at Moscow’s Sheremetyevo airport before boarding a flight to Baku.

His luggage was searched, and an official went through his private chats on different messaging apps.

“He took my phone and spent a good hour scrolling through everything. Luckily, I deleted all chats discussing my opposition to the war on Telegram and Signal,” Andrei said.

“I was asked if I ‘truly’ loved my country and if I was against the war. He asked me why I wanted to ‘flee’ and why I was reading independent outlets like Meduza.

	<p>“It was one of the scariest moments in my life,” said Andrei, who eventually was allowed to board his flight.</p> <p>Amid growing uncertainty, the head of the central bank, Elvira Nabiullina, urged her fellow Russians to stay calm.</p> <p>“We will definitely pull through this...Friends, let’s remember, a lot is dependent on us, we need to leave behind any disputes and just help our colleagues,” Nabiullina said in a rare public statement aired on Russian state television. Russia earlier this week also introduced new laws to stimulate the country’s IT sector. Many Russians working in tech will likely be eyeing to leave the country given that their skills will be valued abroad.</p> <p>But despite efforts by officials to convey a sense of stability, some at the very top of the Russian government have themselves evacuated their loved ones.</p> <p>“Our whole family flew to a country south of Russia earlier this week. We were advised to leave as soon as possible,” said the daughter of a top Russian official who has met Putin on multiple occasions. “We will weather the storm here.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/04 Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/04/zaporizhzhia-nuclear-power-plant-everything-you-need-to-know
GIST	<p>What is the significance of this power plant?</p> <p>The Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, built between 1984 and 1995, is the largest nuclear power plant in Europe and the ninth largest in the world. It has six reactors, each generating 950MW, and a total output of 5,700MW, enough energy for roughly 4m homes.</p> <p>In normal times it produces one-fifth of Ukraine’s electricity and almost half the energy generated by the country’s nuclear power facilities.</p> <p>The plant is located in south-east Ukraine in Enerhodar on the banks of the Kakhovka reservoir on the Dnieper river. It is about 200km from the contested Donbas region and 550km south-east of Kyiv.</p> <p>What happened on Friday morning?</p> <p>A fire broke out in a training building outside the plant in the early hours of Friday, after being shelled by Russian forces, Ukrainian authorities said.</p> <p>The first report came from an employee at the plant, who posted on Telegram that Russian forces had fired on the facility and there was “a real threat of nuclear danger at the largest nuclear power plant in Europe”.</p> <p>Ukraine’s foreign minister confirmed the reports at 2.30am, tweeting that the Russian army was “firing from all sides upon Zaporizhzhia NPP, the largest nuclear power plant in Europe. Fire has already broke out.” He called for an immediate ceasefire to allow firefighters to control the blaze.</p> <p>A short time later, the Ukrainian State Emergency Service reported that radiation at the plant was “within normal limits” and the fire conditions at the plant were “normal”. It reported that the fire was in a building outside the power plant.</p> <p>They later reported that the third power unit at the plant was disconnected at 2.26am, leaving just one of the plant’s six units, unit four, still operating.</p> <p>Early reports of the incident at the power plant sent financial markets in Asia spiralling, with stocks tumbling and oil prices surging further.</p>

Is there a radiation threat?

Ukrainian authorities on Friday morning said the facility was secured and “nuclear safety is now guaranteed”.

Earlier, the International Atomic Energy Agency said the Ukraine regulator told the agency that there was “no change reported in radiation levels at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant site”.

The US also said their latest information showed no indication of elevated radiation levels at the plant. The US energy secretary, Jennifer Granholm, said the reactors “are protected by robust containment structures and reactors are being safely shut down”.

Russia has already captured the defunct Chernobyl plant, 100km north of Kyiv. Some analysts noted the Zaporizhzhia plant is of a different and safer type to Chernobyl, which was the site of the world’s worst nuclear disaster in 1986.

The chances of explosion, nuclear meltdown or radioactive release are low, said Tony Irwin, an honorary associate professor at the Australian National University.

Irwin, who operated nuclear power plants in the UK for three decades, is a former manager of the open-pool Australian lightwater (OPAL) reactor, Australia’s only nuclear reactor.

He said the PWR reactors are “a lot safer” than the reactors at Chernobyl, and did not appear to be damaged yet. The reactors have large concrete containments and built-in fire protection systems, he said, adding:

“Obviously, it’s not a good idea if you start shooting massive missiles at reactors,” he said. “The PWR [pressurised water reactor] type is a much safer sort of reactor, because it’s a two-circuit design reactor. The water that keeps the reactor cool is on a separate circuit to the second one, which actually supplies the power to the turbine and the outside.”

“These reactors have back-up emergency cooling systems as well. In addition to the normal reactor cooling, they’ve got a passive system, they’ve got high-pressure injection systems, they’ve got low-pressure injection systems.”

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HEADLINE	03/03 Gas prices continue climb amid uncertainty
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3378095/washington-gas-prices-continue-to-climb-march-2022/
GIST	<p>A surge in crude oil prices brought on partly by Russia’s ongoing invasion of Ukraine has sent gas prices skyrocketing across the country, and Washington has not been spared from that trend.</p> <p>At this time last year, regular unleaded gasoline in Washington averaged \$3.12 a gallon according to data from AAA. Currently, the state is averaging \$4.10 a gallon at the pump, trailing only California, Oregon, and Nevada, with even higher rates in large cities like Seattle.</p> <p>As of early February, gas in the Seattle metropolitan area averaged \$4.12 a gallon, before rising to \$4.28 in March. Comparatively, San Francisco is now averaging \$5 a gallon, breaking the city’s previous all-time high of \$4.73 set in October of 2021. In Portland, residents are even reporting a handful of gas stations charging upwards of \$6 a gallon.</p> <p>Nationally, gas prices have been rising for the better of the last two-plus months, with the beginning of Russia’s incursion into Ukraine sparking even more dramatic increases.</p>

	<p>“The Russian invasion of Ukraine has sparked high-level concern that oil production could eventually be stifled, or even sanctioned, from the world’s second-largest oil producer, leading to less supply as demand grows,” GasBuddy analyst Patrick De Haan said in a recent blog post.</p> <p>In total, Russia provides roughly 10% of the world’s crude oil supply, with Windermere Chief Economist Matthew Gardner predicting last week that increased prices at the pump were likely to occur in the ensuing days of the conflict in Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/04 China banks won’t come to Russia’s rescue
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-chinas-banks-wont-come-to-russias-rescue-11646389803
GIST	<p>On paper, China’s banks and its homegrown payments system could offer Russia respite from crippling Western sanctions. In practice, it isn’t that simple.</p> <p>The impasse shows how hard it is for Beijing and Moscow to circumvent the dollar-centric international financial system—despite the duo’s shared interest, and even though China has some experience in helping other nations evade sanctions.</p> <p>Western countries have imposed an array of penalties on Russia in the past week, from freezing much of its central bank’s foreign-currency reserves to booting some Russian banks off Swift, the payment network widely used in international banking transactions.</p> <p>China has long been concerned about what it calls “dollar hegemony,” especially as the trade war with the U.S. worsened, and has found an ally in the Kremlin, which was previously sanctioned after its 2014 annexation of Crimea.</p> <p>The two countries increasingly trade with each other without using dollars, giving Russia an important outlet for selling oil, gas and other products without touching the U.S. financial system. Just over a third of Russia’s exports to China were settled in dollars as of last September, the most recent data available shows, down from 96% in 2013. A little more than half of China’s exports the other way were settled in dollars, down from 90% in 2013.</p> <p>But this trade pales against the other markets now largely shut off to Russia, and while Beijing has also been vocal in its recent opposition to sanctions, big Chinese banks aren’t likely to ride to Russia’s rescue. The first problem is that Chinese financial institutions have been less keen on the idea of banking Russian clients than their political leaders are.</p> <p>Prof. Zhiwu Chen, chair of finance at the University of Hong Kong’s business school, was involved in helping arrange early meetings between Chinese banks and Russian companies in 2014 and 2015. At that point, “Chinese banking executives really had no interest. They did not want to do anything with Russia,” he said.</p> <p>Eight years since the Crimea annexation, “the level of warmth has gone up,” said Prof. Chen. “Once these ‘forced marriages’ were imposed and they started living together, some feelings started to develop and emerge.” However, he added: “The push from the top leadership has had some effect but not as much as the leadership would like to see.”</p> <p>Another major headache is a 2017 law that allows the U.S. to penalize foreign entities that trade with sanctioned companies, countries and individuals. For any bank that wants to be able to transact in dollars, the consequences could be drastic.</p> <p>“Chinese financial institutions are taking these sanctions seriously and being very careful about understanding what the risks are,” said Chen Zhu, a Hong Kong-based partner at Morrison & Foerster LLP. Due to the broad Western actions, “there’s now less room for Chinese companies and financial institutions to be doing business with Russian counterparts,” he said.</p>

These secondary sanctions have hindered Chinese banks in the past. After the U.S. sanctioned Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam in 2020, she said she lost access to banking services and had to collect her salary in cash. Neither mainland Chinese nor Hong Kong banks could step in.

China's Cross-Border Interbank Payment System, or CIPS, has been touted as a potential workaround as Russian banks get ejected from Swift. But analysts and lawyers say it isn't fit for this purpose, at least yet.

Launched in 2015, CIPS was developed by China's central bank to promote the international use of the yuan, and largely handles yuan-denominated trades between China and abroad. But as of the third quarter of last year it handled an average of just 13,000 transactions a day, raising questions about how quickly it could scale up. Although the comparison isn't exact, Swift processed more than 40 million messages a day over the same period.

"I don't think it's a viable alternative either as in sanction evasion or as a means of replacing the Swift system in international finance at the moment," said Josh Lipsky, director of the Atlantic Council's GeoEconomics Center. "CIPS is not ready," he said.

Any bank using CIPS to circumvent Swift would also face the risk of secondary sanctions, said Nicholas Turner, a lawyer at Steptoe & Johnson LLP. "A secondary sanction applies to pretty ordinary commercial activity," he said.

The two networks are also complementary as much as they are competing, since Swift is primarily a messaging system. More than 80% of CIPS transactions rely on Swift telegram, according to estimates by ANZ economist Raymond Yeung and his colleagues.

In a statement, Swift said: "Since 2016, Swift and CIPS have been working together to offer Swift as the secure, efficient and reliable channel to connect CIPS with Swift's global user community." CIPS didn't respond to requests for comment.

Swift messaging underpins transactions between the Moscow branch of Industrial and Commercial Bank of China Ltd., the only yuan-clearing bank in Russia, and ICBC's Beijing headquarters, according to research by Prof. Wang Xiaoquan of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

One longer-term option, if Western sanctions stay in place and cause long-term damage to the Russian economy and China's strategic interests, would be for Beijing to tap smaller lenders to deal with Russia.

"It's very easy to create a lot of single-purpose banks just to engage in sanction evading activities to help China's friends," said Prof. Chen. "If the conflict in Ukraine lasts for a few years, a number of such small single-purpose banks could be created as vehicles."

Some small Chinese banks have previously facilitated trade with sanctioned countries such as North Korea and Iran.

In 2009 the oil major China National Petroleum Corp. bought a Xinjiang-based commercial bank, which was later renamed Bank of Kunlun. After that, the bank relied on deposits and other businesses from the CNPC family of companies, according to its annual reports.

In 2012, the Treasury Department sanctioned Bank of Kunlun, together with an Iraqi bank, for helping Iranian banks move millions of dollars, and barred it from accessing the U.S. financial system. Bank of Kunlun has in recent years wound down its activities in Iran, as China diversifies its energy sources.

"Even if Kunlun Bank is sanctioned by the U.S. and other countries, what's the damage? Nothing. You have no business in any of the developed countries to begin with," said Prof. Chen, who was an independent director of PetroChina, the listed arm of CNPC, between 2011 and 2017.

HEADLINE	03/03 Ukraine airport battle proved Putin wrong
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/putin-thought-ukraine-would-fall-quickly-an-airport-battle-proved-him-wrong-11646343121
GIST	<p>Machine-gun fire tore past Anatoliy Kharchenko and cut down several fellow Ukrainian paratroopers as they fought their way through the darkness toward Hostomel Airport.</p> <p>The crack Ukrainian unit was trying to thwart Vladimir Putin's plan for a rapid takeover of Kyiv some 20 miles away. But their mission was going badly.</p> <p>Elite Russian airborne troops had landed in helicopters hours earlier on the first day of Russia's war against Ukraine. If they could hold the airfield, Russia would be able to fly in hundreds of soldiers and move rapidly to seize the Ukrainian capital, part of Mr. Putin's plan to force a quick capitulation.</p> <p>The Russians, protected by a concrete barrier topped with barbed wire, were directing withering fire at Lt. Kharchenko's unit. Another Ukrainian force speeding to join the fight was delayed.</p> <p>The paratroopers pressed on. "We knew what was at stake," Lt. Kharchenko said.</p> <p>Russia's bid to seize the airport embodied its military planners' ambitious assumptions that Ukrainian defense would collapse under overwhelming firepower. Russian officials and propagandists have for years boasted that Moscow's forces could overrun its smaller neighbor in days.</p> <p>But the resistance by Ukraine's army and soldiers such as Lt. Kharchenko, backed by volunteer fighters, has slowed the Russian advance, halting it entirely in the area around Hostomel Airport after a day of back-and-forth fighting. The airport standoff has emerged as the key to Ukrainian resistance and one big reason Russian forces have become bogged down so far. On Thursday, the Russian military made gains in the south, penetrating the city of Kherson and pushing toward Zaporizhya.</p> <p>This account of scenes in one of the most significant battles during the week-old conflict is based on firsthand reports of two soldiers involved in the chaotic fighting, official Ukrainian military reports and videos and images of events at the airfield.</p> <p>The first sign of war in Hostomel came at 7 a.m. on Feb. 24, hours after Mr. Putin announced the invasion, when a cruise missile slammed into the ground meters from an apartment block, blasting a crater and blowing out the building's windows.</p> <p>The airport has a long runway used to test aircraft and for cargo, making it a juicy target for airborne forces to seek control of.</p> <p>The Ukrainian National Guard unit defending the airport was below full strength. Most of its heavy equipment and personnel were hundreds of miles to the east, on the front lines of a war that Russia had fomented eight years earlier.</p> <p>Still, this was the elite Rapid Reaction Brigade, based at the airport precisely because of its fighting skills and ability to deploy quickly. Formed in 2015, it had spent years fighting Russian proxies in eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>National Guard Lt. Andriy Kulish, a 36-year-old who left his job in communications to join the army in 2014, had just made tea for two comrades a few hours after the missile hit when he heard the chopping of helicopter blades.</p> <p>The attack aircraft had flown in low, avoiding Ukrainian radar. They unleashed a barrage of rockets and machine-gun fire on the airport and adjoining military base, sending the Ukrainian soldiers diving for cover.</p>

The Ukrainians felt outmatched. “It was like turning up with a knife to a gunfight,” said Lt. Kulish in an interview.

After the first barrage, he saw two soldiers sheltering near his room.

“Do you want your tea now?” he called out. The incongruous question drew laughter.

Coming under aerial bombardment was a new experience for the unit, because the Russian-led militants in the east have no air force. But the defenders, including officers, contract soldiers and conscripts, soon got their bearings.

They spread out throughout the base and the airport and fired back “passionately and fiercely” with everything they had, said Lt. Kulish: automatic rifles, antiaircraft guns and a few shoulder-fired missiles.

The Russian military said it sent 200 helicopters on the mission. Ukrainian officials and soldiers defending the airport described some 30 or more helicopters.

The aircraft flew in twos and threes, circling for strike runs on the airport and the base.

The initial Russian barrage badly damaged the Antonov airplane Mriya, Ukrainian for Dream, the largest transport aircraft in the world. Lt. Kulish said he saw a plume of smoke rising from the hangar where it was undergoing repairs.

The defenders said they downed three helicopters with missiles. Lt. Kulish said the sheer number of bullets they pumped into two others forced them down despite their armor.

After nearly three hours of fighting, the Russian helicopters began to land and disgorge airborne troops, who fanned out and began firing.

The Ukrainian defenders had run out of antiaircraft missiles and were running low on other ammunition. Now facing an enemy on the ground as well as in the air, the brigade commander ordered a withdrawal, stuffing the unit’s flag down his jacket before they left.

The Russian military said its paratroopers suffered no losses and killed 200 of what it calls “nationalists,” part of Moscow’s false claim that its military is primarily facing nationalists rather than regular army units, which it portrays as weak and demoralized.

Lt. Kulish said his unit had no dead and one injured.

The Russians moved quickly to establish themselves at the base. A CNN crew shot video of the Russian paratroopers running with a machine gun and ammunition in green wooden boxes and exchanging fire with adversaries.

As the foreign forces dug in, Ukrainian intelligence got wind of the Russian plan: to send 18 Il-76 transport aircraft into Ukraine from Belarus. Sixty miles to the west, Lt. Kharchenko’s unit of 48 paratroopers jumped into three helicopters and sped toward Hostomel.

Their mission: get close enough to the landing strip to take out at least the first Il-76 so no other pilots would dare land.

Reaching a field west of the airport, the paratroopers spilled from their helicopters. Lt. Kharchenko led the way quickly but silently across a road flanked by houses, a field and a ditch filled with trees and branches.

As they approached the landing strip, a microdrone buzzed overhead. They had been spotted.

The paratroopers rushed forward, but then hit a 7-foot concrete wall topped with barbed wire. Lacking explosives to blast through, Lt. Kharchenko cut a hole in the wire and started helping his comrades over the wall. Five made it over. Then Russian machine-gun fire burst at them.

Three of the Ukrainians were badly hurt. Lt. Kharchenko radioed for help from another unit of Ukrainian paratroopers in armored vehicles, who were supposed to be assaulting the airport from the north. Their commander, call-sign Monk, replied they weren't there yet.

The Russians pinned down Lt. Kharchenko's paratroopers with heavy fire. A grenade exploded and set alight the grass where they were lying.

Lt. Kharchenko tried to calm the soldiers on the other side of the wall, worried that their screaming would direct the Russians to pick them off.

"We understood that the situation had changed radically," he said. "The enemy had managed to build a good line of defense."

The paratroopers pulled out small shovels and hurriedly dug a tunnel under the wall, managing to drag one of their comrades out.

Lt. Kharchenko called in coordinates for Ukrainian artillery to hit the enemy from the south.

The radio brought good news: Monk and his men had begun attacking from the north. And another Ukrainian unit was rushing in from the southeast in civilian vehicles.

The paratroopers set up a firing point for antiaircraft missiles in the field outside the wall.

Hours after the fighting began, the tide was turning. The Russians were pinned down. The Ukrainian commander told them over the radio that the latest intelligence indicated the Il-76s had aborted their mission. They wouldn't risk a landing.

There was no time to celebrate. Monk came over the radio: A Russian armored column was approaching from the north. Lt. Kharchenko decided he would have to leave the men behind who were trapped on the other side of the fence. Two of them were unconscious.

"My conscience was tortured," he said, "because losing people is a heavy burden for any commander."

The paratroopers withdrew to the south, moving slowly because several were wounded, including Lt. Kharchenko, who had been shot in the leg. It took them 40 minutes to cross a field that they had sped across in 10 minutes in the other direction.

Suddenly, they heard the roar of Russian armored vehicles heading their way. They quickly set up an ambush, taking out the tank at the front of the column and firing rocket-propelled grenades at the other vehicles. The remaining vehicles turned around.

As the Ukrainians trudged south toward Kyiv, a civilian car pulled up. In the dark, Lt. Kharchenko worried whether the driver was friend or foe. Then he saw a Ukrainian flag in the passenger window and collapsed inside with relief.

The paratroopers hadn't retaken the airport, but they had foiled the Russian airborne operation. Ukraine quickly brought up reinforcements that have halted Russian forces on a front line around Hostomel and in neighboring towns that have seen heavy fighting in recent days. The big troop carriers from Belarus haven't landed at Hostomel.

Lt. Kharchenko is recovering in a hospital in a nearby town. He was smoking outside the day after the raid when a soldier he didn't recognize approached him.

	<p>“I am your eyes,” the soldier told him. It was the first paratrooper who had jumped over the fence at the airport. He had crawled out despite severe back wounds from a grenade and been taken to a hospital by locals.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/04 China second thoughts Russia friendship?
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-russia-xi-putin-ukraine-war-11646279098
GIST	<p>In the months leading up to Xi Jinping making common cause with Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Chinese leader was focused on one country, and it wasn’t Ukraine.</p> <p>His ambitions for alignment with Mr. Putin had one main purpose: presenting a united front against the U.S. The result, according to Chinese officials, foreign-policy advisers to Beijing and an analysis of public statements, was the Feb. 4 China-Russia declaration that the countries’ friendship had “no limits.”</p> <p>Russia’s subsequent invasion of its neighbor is forcing Beijing into adjusting its foreign policy in a way that risks damaging relations with the U.S.-led West and undoing years of efforts to paint itself as a responsible world leader.</p> <p>In Beijing, the ripple effects of a move that may cost China dearly are now sinking in, say the officials and advisers. Some officials say they are fearful of the consequences of getting so close to Russia at the expense of other relationships—especially when Russian aggression against Ukraine is isolating Moscow in much of the world.</p> <p>Already, many politicians from Washington to Brussels have grouped Beijing together with Moscow as a new “axis”—a term giving Western alliances more reason to disengage from China and form closer ties among themselves.</p> <p>“Elevating the partnership with Russia on the eve of its invasion of Ukraine was a massive foreign-policy blunder by Xi,” said Jude Blanchette, a China specialist at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank focused on international relations. “The cost is very real for China and is exposing the limits of Xi’s policy.”</p> <p>China’s Foreign Ministry didn’t respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>Just a year ago, Mr. Xi was making remarks such as “The East is rising, and the West is in decline,” as China’s economy roared back while much of the world was mired in Covid-19 lockdowns. Beijing was trying to shape and inhabit a role for itself as a leader on combating climate change and a benevolent sponsor of developing nations, even as it was ramping up nationalistic rhetoric, including around its claims to Taiwan.</p> <p>This year, during which Mr. Xi is expected to break with precedent and seek a third term in power, he is facing an economic downturn at home that is largely a result of his own policies—and a geopolitical shift in which China has placed itself on one side of a gulf that has almost all of the rest of the world on the other side.</p> <p>What Beijing will do next depends on how hard the U.S. will push sanctions on Russia, say the foreign-policy advisers. Mr. Xi also likely will continue to maintain his partnership with Mr. Putin, as Beijing sees little chance of improvement in its U.S. ties and needs to keep Russia around as its most important strategic collaborator even if it isn’t an outright ally. But that will require China to continue to straddle an increasingly difficult diplomatic position.</p> <p>‘Awkward nexus’</p>

In internal meetings over the past year, the officials and foreign-policy advisers say, Mr. Xi has emphasized the U.S. as the biggest threat to China's interests, centering China's foreign policy on aligning with Russia to confront Washington.

Beijing started planning for the Feb. 4 Xi-Putin summit in late November, as soon as Mr. Putin accepted the invitation to attend the opening of the Beijing Winter Olympics.

At the time, Western nations including the U.S., the U.K. and Canada were laying the groundwork for a diplomatic boycott of the Games over China's human-rights record. The Biden administration was about to kick off a Summit for Democracy in early December that sought to establish a clear alternative to Beijing's autocratic rule. Those moves infuriated Beijing and drove its decision-making, say the officials and advisers, who are familiar with the process leading to the Feb. 4 declaration.

One of Mr. Xi's objectives was to lay out an ideological foundation for the partnership between China and Russia, those people said. To that end, the Chinese ambassador to Washington teamed up with his Russian counterpart in publishing an unusual joint opinion piece in late November in the magazine of the Center for the National Interest, a Washington-based conservative think tank established by former President Richard Nixon.

The two argued that democracy "can be realized in multiple ways" and isn't the prerogative of any one country or group of countries. It called China "a whole-process, socialist democracy" and said democracy was the fundamental principle of Russia's "democratic federative law-governed state."

The Feb. 4 joint statement said both countries "have profound democratic traditions rooted in a thousand years of development," a phrase reflecting Mr. Xi's ideological views. A thousand years ago, China was in the emperor-ruled and feudal Song Dynasty, known for a highly developed bureaucracy.

It was Beijing that suggested including that the two countries' friendship has "no limits"—wording read with apprehension in the West—according to the officials and advisers. The intention was less a declaration China would stand by Russia in case of war than a strong message to the U.S. about the resolve the two have in confronting what they see as increased American threats, the people said.

What didn't factor into Beijing's planning was Moscow's increasingly heated rhetoric on Ukraine, those people said. Even as the Russian troop buildup along the border of the Eastern European country intensified and Chinese officials were presented with American intelligence on a likely Russian invasion, Beijing still dismissed that scenario as unlikely.

And, these people said, China saw Mr. Putin's brinkmanship as already getting him desired results, including a divided North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

"China's eagerness to present a strong alignment with Russia to counter the U.S. caused it to miss all the signs and to go in a dangerous direction," said Yun Sun, director of the China program at the Stimson Center, a Washington think tank focused on promoting peace and security.

The Feb. 4 statement named the U.S. six times. There was no mention of Ukraine. Nonetheless, Mr. Xi's endorsement of Mr. Putin's opposition to NATO expansion in the statement focused the attention of many in the West on China's role in the developing Ukraine crisis.

"It's undeniable that right now, China is occupying an awkward nexus in which they're trying to sustain their deep and fundamental relationship with Russia," said Kurt Campbell, President Biden's senior coordinator for Indo-Pacific Policy at the National Security Council, on Monday during a webinar hosted by the German Marshall Fund.

Mr. Campbell said the U.S. was hoping China could play a critical role in encouraging Mr. Putin to reconsider invading Ukraine but said, "We believe they chose not to weigh in in advance."

The price

As soon as Mr. Putin left Beijing after the Feb. 4 declaration, China's top leadership disappeared from public view, huddling to form a response to the developing Ukraine crisis. More than a week later, they emerged to embark on [a series of statements that showed a desire to dial back](#) or clarify Beijing's embrace of the Kremlin.

Since the Russian troops marched into Ukraine on Feb. 24, China has been walking what many foreign-policy experts call a diplomatic tightrope. It is locked into having to help Russia and has little interest in seeing Moscow collapse economically, while it is trying to stick to its foreign-policy principles around sovereignty and attempting to prevent its relations with the U.S. and Europe from completely collapsing.

Beijing has refrained from coming to Moscow's aid in a significant way. China is taking steps to buy Russian farm and energy products. But it is complying with the more damaging financial sanctions the U.S. has imposed on Russia, for fear of losing access to the dollar-dominated global trading system, say some Chinese bankers. They say their default position is to comply with the sanctions unless higher-ups tell them otherwise.

China's ambiguous stance on the Russia-Ukraine war will likely speed up moves by countries from the U.K. and Australia to Japan to guard against Beijing, foreign-policy analysts say. They were already firming up economic and military ties with the U.S. and each other in the face of Beijing's coercive behavior toward some of its trading partners and increased military activities near the Taiwan Strait.

The [Biden administration is preparing to further harden its economic policy toward China](#). New measures to be rolled out in coming months include a new investigation into Beijing's support for sectors it considers strategic, using Section 301 of the Trade Act, a powerful tool allowing Washington to take punitive action against certain practices deemed violating the trade law.

Beijing is finding greater resistance to its effort to deepen its relations with Central and Eastern Europe. Prospects are dimming for the European Parliament to unfreeze the legislative process for ratifying the European Union's investment pact with China that could bolster economic ties between the bloc and Beijing, say European business executives. And a planned summit between China and the EU for April, if it isn't canceled, is now likely to be dominated by discussions of China's position on Ukraine.

A phone call between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Ukrainian counterpart Tuesday illustrates Beijing's conundrum in trying to adhere to its foreign-policy stance while not outright condemning Russia's invasion, and nodding to Russian rhetoric that NATO expansion threatens its security.

"The security of one country shouldn't be achieved at the expense of the security of other countries," Mr. Wang said to Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba during the call, "and the regional security can't be achieved by expanding military blocs."

Beijing's most difficult contortions are on territorial sovereignty. China has built its foreign policy around the principle that a country's territory is inviolable and its internal affairs should be free from interference by others. That notion forms the foundation of China's argument that the rest of the world should stay out of its claims on Taiwan, since it regards the self-ruled island as a part of China.

China's commitment to that principle seemingly would force it to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine, something it has refrained from doing. Its policy statements have called for dialogue to resolve the crisis, avoiding the word invasion. Meanwhile, Western officials worry that Russia's actions based on the argument that Ukraine is historically a part of Russia could embolden China to step up its own long-stated goal to bring Taiwan into its fold.

Personal ties

Since rising to power in late 2012, Mr. Xi has made himself the dominant force in China's foreign policy and put emphasis on what he calls "big-power diplomacy"—a marked change from the relatively

unassuming foreign-policy agendas of previous Chinese leaders that featured compromise and focused on building up ties with the U.S.

The more centralized and aggressive foreign-affairs approach, the foreign-policy advisers say, means that views that differ from the top leader's agenda aren't filtering up to Mr. Xi.

Today, despite Chinese state media's pro-Russia rhetoric, some advisers privately question whether the partnership could cut China off from Western technologies and other resources and hurt its development, according to the foreign-policy advisers. After all, they have noted in private discussions, it is China's opening to the U.S. and its allies that has propelled enormous Chinese growth in the past four decades.

China and Russia's shared interest in confronting the U.S. has helped drive their relationship to its closest point since early in the Cold War. Part of that is due to the personal ties between Messrs. Xi and Putin, authoritarians who have visions of restoring their countries to past glory, even if in China's case that past was centuries ago.

Mr. Xi's first foreign trip as China's leader was to Russia, in 2013, during which he told Mr. Putin, "I have a similar personality to yours." Both have since met about three dozen times. Mr. Putin has shown Mr. Xi the kind of respect he has sometimes withheld from other world leaders.

Sergey Radchenko, an international-relations professor at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, pointed to instances where Mr. Putin would be deliberately late for meetings with foreign dignitaries. On one occasion, he brought out his dog to a meeting with then-German Chancellor Angela Merkel who, Mr. Putin knew, was terrified of dogs.

"He would never let himself do anything like that to Xi," Mr. Radchenko said. "He's extremely respectful to Xi because he sees a close relationship with China as one of Russia's most valuable political assets."

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HEADLINE	03/03 Ukraine's leader meets the media
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/world/europe/zelensky-ukraine-russia-invasion.html
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — Unshaven and wearing a military T-shirt, a haggard President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine on Thursday hosted his first news conference since the war began, inviting journalists into his office building, now fortified with sandbags.</p> <p>In an animated briefing, Mr. Zelensky, whose defiance has made him a symbol of Ukrainian resistance to the Russian invasion, laid out the state of negotiations with Russia, voiced pride in his people, pleaded for a no-fly zone and spoke frankly about fear of dying.</p> <p>Beyond the answers Mr. Zelensky provided to questions, pulling a chair close to attending journalists, the news conference seemed intended to signal that his battered government is at least still functioning a week into the war, despite increasingly dire conditions in Kyiv.</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky said he was particularly proud of ordinary Ukrainians' resistance to the Russian attack, a seething, angry uprising by much of society even as Russian tanks bore down on major cities and the capital.</p> <p>"That is why I am so strong and so decisive," he said. "We have a special people, an extraordinary people." He said that no senior officials had fled the country, and several top aides turned up at the news conference.</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky said he had appealed to Western leaders for additional military support, including asking President Emmanuel Macron of France and Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine, an unlikely proposition, while also pursuing negotiations with the Russian leadership. The second of two rounds of talks with Russia in recent days took place on Thursday.</p>

“We are ready to speak on all topics,” he said. Mr. Zelensky’s negotiator at the talks, Mykhailo Podolyak, said later Thursday negotiations wrapped up with an agreement on cease-fire corridors for civilians to escape heavy combat, but no progress on a settlement.

“The Russian side has long ago formed the answers to their questions,” Mr. Zelensky said. “What is the point of posing questions if you long ago have the answers? For now, this is the difficulty of this dialogue.”

He said he was ready to compromise on some points, but he did not specify which, and said he would not bend on conditions threatening Ukrainian sovereignty.

“There are issues where it’s needed to find compromise, so people don’t die, and there are issues where there can be no compromise,” he said. “Well, we cannot just say, ‘here it is, it’s your country now, Ukraine is part of Russia.’ This is just impossible. So why suggest it?”

Reporters arrived at the presidential office in minivans that wove through concrete barriers and steel I-beams welded into crosses and placed on the streets to slow tanks. In the government district of Kyiv, usually a quiet, leafy neighborhood of offices and elegant, 19th century apartment blocks, armored cars blocked crossroads.

The vans sped through a warren of courtyards and into a back entrance to the presidential office building. Inside the building, security officials escorted journalists by flashlight through darkened corridors filled with soldiers.

Sandbags had been stacked along the windowsills. At doorways, firing positions were in place to shoot from inside Mr. Zelensky’s office compound onto the street outside, suggesting a readiness to hold out even if street fighting reaches the site.

Mr. Zelensky thanked the reporters for turning up.

“It’s best to see it with your own eyes,” he said of the city’s preparations for defense. Still, he said, he was doing all he could to negotiate.

Mr. Zelensky said he was getting about three hours of sleep a night. His cheeks sagged with weariness. He was, though, animated and gestured energetically to drive home points.

Though the briefing was held in a conference room to suggest some modicum of normality, soldiers with assault rifles stood in the room and the windows were blocked by piles of white sandbags.

He reiterated his request for direct talks with President Vladimir V. Putin, something the Russian leader has rebuffed both before and after the start of hostilities.

“It’s not that I want to talk to Putin,” he said. “I need to talk to Putin. The world needs to talk to Putin. There is no other way to stop this war.”

Of the conflict and what he described as reports the Russian army did not intend to repatriate its war dead to avoid stirring antiwar sentiment at home, he said, “this is a nightmare. I cannot even imagine the type of man who would plan such acts.”

Many of the Russian soldiers were 18- and 19-year-olds, said Mr. Zelensky, who is 45. He noted that the soldiers are about the age of his own daughter and “could be my children.” He added: “They will die in uniforms because of decisions made by men in suits.”

Mr. Zelensky said he had asked Mr. Scholz and Mr. Macron to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine. The idea has been largely rebuffed by Western governments as all but impossible, for risking direct conflict between NATO and Russian forces.

But he said that Russian aggression would only spread if not stopped in Ukraine. The leadership in Moscow, he said, would at some point push on to other Eastern European countries and eventually build a new “Berlin Wall.”

He criticized German officials for working at cross-purposes with Western efforts to pressure Russia into a settlement in the long-simmering eastern Ukraine war by building a new natural gas pipeline, Nord Stream 2, to Russia. The pipeline was intended to provide cheap energy for Germany’s economy, though the project is now suspended.

Mr. Zelensky, a former comedian who has always had a keen sense of image and storytelling in politics, said he was aware that his repeated televised appeals for resistance, and continued presence in the beleaguered capital, had turned him into a symbol in many countries of bravery and defense of democracy. That was helping Ukraine, he said.

“I’m very happy the world united” to support Ukraine, said Mr. Zelensky, who has refused to flee the country, turning down a reported American evacuation offer. “I need ammunition, not a ride,” he said at the time.

Mr. Zelensky did have caustic words for Prime Minister Naftali Bennett of Israel, who has balanced support for Ukraine with an effort to maintain ties with Russia and had blocked some transfers of weapons to Ukraine that include Israeli-manufactured parts. Mr. Zelensky, who is Jewish, noted that a Russian missile this week killed five civilians on the territory of a Holocaust memorial site in Kyiv, Babyn Yar. The missile had targeted a television broadcasting tower.

Mr. Zelensky said he was inspired to see images of people praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem wrapped in blue and yellow Ukrainian flags. He suggested it was time for the Israeli government to take a moral stand. “Everything is tested by this moment,” he said. “I don’t feel that he is wrapped in the flag of Ukraine,” he said of Mr. Bennett.

Asked if he was afraid of dying in the war, he said everybody has such fears.

“I’m an alive person, like any human being,” he said. “And if a person is not afraid of losing his life, or the lives of his children, there is something unwell about that person.” He added, though, that as president, “I simply do not have the right” to be afraid.

If he were not president, he said, he probably would have joined the volunteers who accepted rifles when the military started handing them out last week, and so would be facing risks in any case. He said he might also have chosen to help by handing out food to soldiers instead. He quipped that, “I am probably not as good a shot as some other people.”

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HEADLINE	03/04 Kremlin vows victory in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/world/europe/russia-ukraine-invasion-kremlin.html
GIST	<p>ODESSA, Ukraine — Russian forces advanced deeper into southern Ukraine on Thursday, appearing intent on seizing the country’s entire Black Sea coast, as the number of people fleeing Ukraine reached one million just a week into Russia’s invasion and bombardment of cities and towns.</p> <p>Defiant Ukrainians, bolstered by a huge influx of weapons from NATO countries, have put up surprisingly effective resistance, while Moscow’s forces have run into a host of logistical problems, according to Western military and intelligence assessments.</p>

But the Russians, with numerical and technological superiority, have been slowed, not stopped, and the Kremlin insisted in a statement that the war was “going according to plan.”

Russian forces surging out of Crimea cut off Mariupol, a port city to the east, while to the west, where they seized the city of Kherson on Wednesday, they advanced on the port of Mykolaiv, leaving them just 60 miles from Odessa, a vital shipping center and the largest city in the south.

In a second round of talks held in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine agreed to establish “humanitarian corridors,” with possible cease-fires in them, for civilians to evacuate the most dangerous areas, and to allow food and medicine to reach those places. But there was no sign of progress on resolving the overall conflict.

A fire broke out early Friday morning at a complex in southern Ukraine that is home to Europe’s largest nuclear power plant, after Russian troops fired on the area, [Ukraine’s foreign minister said](#). Security camera footage filmed early on Friday and verified by The Times showed a building ablaze inside the power complex near a line of military vehicles. The videos appeared to show people in the vehicles firing at buildings in the power plant, but it was unclear if the vehicles were Russian or Ukrainian.

President Biden spoke with President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine about the fire on Thursday night, and urged Russia to “cease its military activities in the area and allow firefighters and emergency responders to access the site,” according to a White House description of the call.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said on Twitter that it had been informed by Ukrainian regulators that there had been no reported change in radiation levels at the plant, and that the fire had not affected “essential equipment.”

For eight years, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has been building what amounts to a massive military staging area in Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula he invaded and annexed from Ukraine in 2014, and forces stationed there appeared well equipped to charge out of their bases and seize swaths of southern Ukrainian territory the moment the order came.

Russia’s near-monopoly on naval power in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov should have provided additional firepower to assist ground troops. Instead, their advance has been sluggish, hampered by operational breakdowns and a seeming inability of commanders to coordinate disparate military forces, which if combined effectively should have easily overwhelmed Ukraine’s defenses.

In the north, an enormous Russian military convoy has stalled for three days near the capital, Kyiv — for reasons not entirely clear — and while Russian forces have extensively shelled large cities like Kharkiv, Chernihiv and Kyiv, causing civilian casualties, none have fallen to Moscow’s control.

“I thought along the Black Sea coast was where they would have their best success immediately because of the huge advantage of having this bridgehead in Crimea,” said Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, the former commander of the U.S. Army in Europe. “The fact that here we are on day eight, that they still haven’t captured Mariupol, has got to be frustrating for the Russians.”

Russians have seized a coastal corridor along the Sea of Azov, linking their forces in Crimea to those in southeastern Ukraine. In that stretch, only Mariupol held out on Thursday, despite a massive Russian bombardment that had cut power, water and heat to the city. The mayor, Vadym Boichenko, painted a grim picture of the siege of a city blockaded by land and sea.

“Mariupol is still being shelled, the women, kids and elderly people are suffering,” he said in a statement on Facebook. “Those hypocrites came here ‘to save’ Russian-speaking people,” he added, “but in reality they are conducting genocide of our people.”

Mr. Putin, acknowledging Russia’s war casualties for the first time, said Thursday that he would pay the equivalent of almost \$50,000 to the family of each Russian soldier killed.

Mr. Zelensky said that 9,000 Russian troops had been killed, in addition to thousands of Ukrainian casualties, civilian and military — a day after Moscow said it had lost fewer than 500 troops.

Such figures could not be verified, but even by the Russian count, it is already the bloodiest conflict for Russia's military since the 1999-2000 Chechen war.

Nonetheless the Kremlin, in a statement, said that its aims of ensuring a “demilitarized” and neutral Ukraine “will be achieved no matter what.”

Unshaven and haggard, Mr. Zelensky, who has emerged as an anti-Kremlin hero in the West for defying Mr. Putin and remaining in Kyiv, held his first news conference since the invasion, in a room lined with sandbags in case of shelling. He expressed willingness to compromise but did not specify on what issues, and held out little hope of reaching an agreement anytime soon. “The Russian side has long ago formed the answers to their questions,” he told reporters.

In a further sign that the conflict could worsen, President Emmanuel Macron of France emerged pessimistic from a long phone conversation with Mr. Putin, according to an aide to Mr. Macron, who said the Russian leader seemed determined to control all of Ukraine.

The invasion has confronted Europe with one of the largest humanitarian crises since World War II. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, [Filippo Grandi](#), said that one million people had fled Ukraine for neighbors to the West, primarily Poland — an increase of more than 300,000 from the day before. Hundreds of thousands of others have been displaced from their homes but remain within Ukraine, or fled or were evacuated eastward, into Russia. Ukraine's railroad agency said westbound trains were only for evacuation.

Before the invasion, many military analysts believed that Russia would make short work of the Ukrainian forces. Even Ukraine's own generals predicted that a full-scale Russian assault with shock troops and air power could overwhelm their military in days, if not hours. The Kremlin appeared to expect a quick capitulation.

It has not unfolded that way. Ukrainian troops, armed with anti-tank and antiaircraft missiles, have proved resourceful, legions of civilians have enlisted in the Territorial Defense Forces, an auxiliary to the military, and the Ukrainian government says that 50,000 Ukrainians have returned from abroad to fight Russia.

The British Defense Ministry said the Russian column stalled north of Kyiv, believed to include essential food and fuel supplies as well as heavy artillery, had “been delayed by staunch Ukrainian resistance, mechanical breakdown and congestion.”

Jens Stoltenberg, NATO's secretary general, after meeting in Brussels with Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the Ukrainian military was “performing better and putting up more resistance than most experts expected, and surely more than Russia expected.”

In the south, Russian forces that captured their first [major Ukrainian city, Kherson](#), a shipbuilding center ordinarily home to 300,000 people, were on the move toward Mykolaiv, with a peacetime population of almost 500,000 and one of Ukraine's three largest ports.

Roughly 800 Russian vehicles, including a column of Grad rocket launchers, was nearing Mykolaiv, from the east, south and north, the city's mayor, Oleksandr Senkevych, said on Thursday. As of Thursday morning, there had been no shelling inside the city, he said, but Ukrainian forces on the perimeter were targeted with rocket fire, forcing them to change positions constantly.

“The city is ready for war,” he said.

Charging further into Ukraine could put Russian forces in danger of stretching themselves too thinly, said Michael Kofman, the director of Russia studies at CNA, a research institute based in Arlington, Va. Already the forces in Ukraine's south and elsewhere appear in some instances to have outpaced logistical units, forcing them to await fuel and other supplies.

Even so, preparations continued on Thursday to shore up defenses in Odessa, a city of one million and Ukraine's largest port. The mayor, Gennady Trukhanov, visited an industrial area on the outskirts where teams of men were filling sandbags from a mountain of yellow dirt for barricades.

"Every bag of sand you fill is protection for our city," he told the men.

In the morning came word that several Russian naval ships had left Crimea, headed toward Odessa. Ukrainian officials said the ships could have been deployed to assist an attack by Russian land forces, though by evening there was no clear sense of the vessels' whereabouts. A single Ukrainian warship could be seen from Odessa's shoreline.

Mr. Kofman said it was unlikely the Russian Navy would mount an amphibious assault on the city until its forces were also ready to attack by land.

Mr. Zelensky, like some Western officials, said many Russian soldiers, including some taken prisoner, had no idea they would be sent into Ukraine and were aghast to learn it, not understanding why they would be conducting such a war. "They don't know why they are here," [he said in a speech](#) posted on his Facebook page. "These are not warriors of a superpower. These are confused children who have been used."

As word filters back of death, injury and capture, Russians are [awakening to the reality](#) of a war many had not expected and did not want. Ukrainian officials and ordinary citizens are posting to social media photos and videos of Russians killed or captured, and burned-out or abandoned Russian military vehicles. Rumors swirled through Russia of impending martial law, conscription and closed borders.

In just a week, sanctions and boycotts have deeply wounded the Russian economy, and more punitive measures are expected. Volkswagen, Mercedes-Benz, Toyota, Ford, General Motors, Apple, Spotify, Accenture and Ikea are among the many companies suspending operations in Russia. Major oil companies have called off joint ventures with Russian counterparts.

While some prominent Russians have denounced the war, the government is cracking down on the last vestiges of independent media, limiting access to information about the conflict. Lawmakers proposed prison sentences of up to 15 years for media that publish "fakes" — widely taken to mean anything that contradicts the Kremlin line.

Echo of Moscow, a freewheeling radio station, dissolved itself. The television channels Dozhd and TV Rain suspended operations indefinitely. Dmitri Muratov, the journalist who shared the Nobel Peace Prize last year, said that his newspaper, Novaya Gazeta, could be close to having to shut down.

Dozens of the [top Russian chess players](#) made statements opposing the war and appealing to Mr. Putin to stop it, including Ian Nepomniachtchi, the top-ranked Russian and recently a finalist for the world championship; Alexandra Kosteniuk, a former women's world champion; and Alexander Grischuk, several times a candidate for the world championship.

Mr. Putin has insisted that Ukraine is rightfully a part of Russia, not a real country, and he is bent on re-establishing Moscow's hold over much of Eastern Europe. He has called NATO's eastward expansion a threat, particularly the prospect that Ukraine might join someday.

But the war has hardened anti-Kremlin attitudes in Ukraine, a former Soviet republic, and far beyond. NATO has ramped up forces on its eastern flank, and an array of countries are sending advanced weaponry to Ukraine. Even Germany, a NATO member that had not sent arms into a conflict zone, has begun

	<p>helping to arm Kyiv's forces, as have Sweden and Finland, nonmembers that had tried to remain neutral in East-West clashes.</p> <p>After Russia invaded, Ukraine applied for membership in the European Union, a step that would greatly deepen its ties to the West, and E.U. officials say that two other former Soviet republics, Georgia and Moldova, may do the same.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/04 ATF struggles to push for gun reform
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/04/us/politics/atf-biden-gun-reform.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — In late January, days before President Biden reiterated a vow to halt the sale of parts used to make deadly “ghost guns,” the federal official responsible for enacting that policy delivered a far more reassuring message to the gun industry.</p> <p>The official, Marvin G. Richardson, the acting director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, told a gathering of weapons manufacturers that the rule banning online sales of untraceable components for homemade weapons — expected to have already been in place — would not be completed until June. It was his first announcement on the timeline.</p> <p>This jarring split screen — a president demanding action on gun violence and an industry-friendly subordinate pumping the brakes — infuriated some Biden allies. Mr. Richardson's leadership of A.T.F., they believe, reflected the White House's waning focus on gun control after the defeat last year of Mr. Biden's pick to run the bureau, David Chipman, who had vowed to overhaul an agency that has been without a permanent leader since 2015.</p> <p>“A.T.F. needs a top-to-bottom overhaul,” said John Feinblatt, the president of Everytown for Gun Safety, the gun control group funded by former Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg of New York. “That starts with the administration making sure the agency has the resources and leadership it needs to regulate an industry that has consistently prioritized profits over public safety.”</p> <p>Gun control has long been a centerpiece of Mr. Biden's agenda, a point he underlined during his State of the Union address on Tuesday when he declared that his proposals to ban assault weapons and eliminate the ban on lawsuits against gunmakers would “save lives.” But Senate Republicans are blocking him, forcing the White House to pursue limited executive actions through an underfunded agency systematically weakened by congressional Republicans and the gun lobby.</p> <p>And increasingly, progressives see Mr. Richardson's low-key leadership of A.T.F.'s policymaking functions as part of the problem.</p> <p>Administration officials say Mr. Richardson is making the best of a thankless job and has spent much of his time focused on deploying agents to deal with gun violence. His leadership “has been critical” to combating the recent national rise in shootings, said a spokeswoman for the Justice Department, Dena Iverson.</p> <p>In recent weeks, anti-gun groups have stepped up pressure on the White House and Attorney General Merrick B. Garland as the administration continues a protracted search for a new nominee to lead the bureau. In addition to pushing for faster enforcement of the ghost gun rule, they have urged Mr. Biden to create a special gun violence office in the West Wing comparable to the one he has established for climate policy.</p> <p>But that proposal has been rejected by Susan Rice, the president's domestic policy adviser. She has told gun control activists, including Fred Guttenberg, whose daughter was killed in the school shooting in Parkland, Fla., in 2018, that there is no need to hang another “shingle” in the West Wing to deal with the problem.</p>

“The White House has already taken some very important actions, and I respect the enormous amount of things they have to do,” said Mr. Guttenberg, who met with Ms. Rice in December. “But the sole purpose of establishing an office is not to make policy, it’s about sending a message that gun violence matters, that there is someone in the White House working 24/7 on this.”

Last week, a coalition of 43 groups sent a list of action items to Mr. Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, urging them to move faster on an A.T.F. pick, create the new office and “use the authority” of the White House to inject a new sense of urgency into the issue. “The administration can, and must, do more,” said the groups, which included the gun control organizations Brady and Giffords.

That letter was prompted in part by Mr. Richardson’s appearance at the convention alongside Lawrence G. Keane, the general counsel for the National Shooting Sports Foundation, which hosted the event and is the gun industry’s main trade group.

Mr. Keane began the talk by praising Mr. Richardson’s leadership, adding that “the relationship between the industry and A.T.F. has really grown stronger.”

Mr. Keane has teamed with A.T.F. on several campaigns to limit illegal firearms purchases, and he has known Mr. Richardson for years. But he also helped lead the campaign that sank Mr. Chipman’s nomination, waging a scorched-earth effort to block a man he viewed as an existential threat to his booming industry.

At times, Mr. Keane has publicly questioned Mr. Biden’s age and mental capacity, and Mr. Chipman has accused him of endangering his family by reposting a photograph purporting to show Mr. Chipman, a former A.T.F. agent, standing in the ashes of Waco — even though he arrived after the bloody 1993 siege in Texas.

(Mr. Keane has said that reposting a misleading photo was an error, and that he quickly removed the image from social media; Mr. Richardson, by contrast, was present as a young agent during the confrontation between federal agents and members of the Branch Davidian cult.)

But Mr. Richardson, who has been at the A.T.F. for more than 30 years and is expected to retire in the next year, was not the only bureau official to attend the convention, known as the Shooting, Hunting, Outdoor Trade Show, or SHOT Show. The event typically attracts 55,000 attendees and raises \$35 million for the National Shooting Sports Foundation by renting space to hundreds of vendors, including a handful of companies selling ghost gun components.

A total of 65 A.T.F. employees went this year, and eight of them were assigned to the security details of top bureau officials. On average, about 55 staff members have attended the three-day event each year since 2015, according to an agency tally of attendees provided by an administration official.

A.T.F. officials say it is necessary to deploy such a large contingent in the presence of those they regulate to answer technical questions about compliance with federal law and regulations. But critics of the bureau say the presence of so many A.T.F. employees is emblematic of the agency’s too-cozy relationship with the industry.

In an interview, Mr. Keane said he did not view Mr. Richardson’s attendance as an endorsement of his views. Instead, he said he saw it as a good-faith effort to coordinate enactment of the ghost gun regulation, a rule banning the use of high-capacity “bump stocks” later in the year and a new electronic bookkeeping system.

He defended his previous comments about Mr. Biden, saying they were a reaction to the president’s threat, so far unfulfilled, to pass a law removing the gun industry’s immunity from civil lawsuits.

“My beef is not with Marvin, who is doing a decent, nonideological job,” Mr. Keane said.

Ms. Iverson, the Justice Department spokeswoman, said Mr. Richardson was simply reading from a White House budget office document when he cited the June deadline for the ghost gun rule, which had been delayed by the need to sift through more than a quarter of a million public comments. Mr. Richardson dedicated 30 A.T.F. staff members to process what was the largest-ever response to a firearms proposal, Ms. Iverson said.

But two White House officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss the matter, said Mr. Richardson had misspoken and that the rule would, in fact, be finished by early April. They said that another claim by Mr. Richardson, that enforcement of the regulation would begin 90 days after the rule was completed, was also off base, and that the gap would be closer to 60 days.

The ghost gun rule is moving faster than most federal regulations. But anti-violence groups and local officials in California, where ghost guns now account for 25 to 50 percent of weapons recovered at crime scenes, say that a delay of even a few weeks will allow manufacturers extra time to pump out untraceable components that can be used in crimes.

“This is a ticking bomb,” said T. Christian Heyne, the vice president for policy at Brady, which has pressured A.T.F. to move faster on the regulation.

“Ghost gun parts are being sold every day that this rule is not finalized, so time is critical,” he added. “Six months from now, the problem will, without question, be worse than it is right now.”

Mr. Biden made the same point in a speech last month to law enforcement officials in New York City, telling them he was pushing to finalize the rule in the spring. Ghost guns are “as deadly as any other weapon out there,” he said.

White House officials say that the president is doing all that he can to address the crisis, given the refusal of Senate Republicans to consider restrictions on some semiautomatic weapons, red flag laws to keep mentally ill people from carrying guns and enhancing background checks.

But bureau officials said Mr. Richardson had tried his best to balance the bureau’s concurrent roles as a law enforcement agency that partners with local departments on gun cases and a regulatory body that licenses firearms dealers and regulates industry practices.

They also emphasized the tight, at times crippling, constraints the bureau must operate under: One federal law, for instance, prevents them from using electronic records to trace crime guns, so the work must be done using moldy paper purchase records stacked in boxes.

Even the agency’s harshest critics concede that its employees work under intolerable conditions and praise A.T.F.’s deployment of its investigative resources.

In the past two years, the bureau has stepped up efforts to break up weapons trafficking rings, collaborating with local authorities to open more than 540 new investigations since last summer that have resulted in the seizure of more than 3,100 guns, according to a Justice Department estimate.

Local A.T.F. officials have been especially creative. John B. DeVito, the director of the agency’s office in New York, recently created a joint task force with the New York Police Department to address a huge spike in gun crime. To ensure closer cooperation, he took the highly unusual step of ordering his agents to work in the same Lower Manhattan office with the Police Department’s intelligence division.

“No one ever tried to do this before,” said John Miller, the department’s deputy commissioner for intelligence and counterterrorism. “But it was all his idea. It’s amazing what can be accomplished when people check their egos at the door.”

HEADLINE	03/03 Temporary protected status for Ukrainians
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/us/politics/ukraine-temporary-protected-status-immigration.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Biden administration announced on Thursday it would offer humanitarian relief to Ukrainians who have been living in the country without legal documentation since March 1 or earlier, signaling additional support for citizens of Ukraine as Russia advanced in the south of the country.</p> <p>Canada announced similar relief on Thursday, as did the European Union, which said it would offer three years of protection for Ukrainian refugees. The United Nations predicted that 10 million Ukrainians, about a quarter of the country's population, could be displaced by the Russian invasion. Already, a million people have fled the country as refugees.</p> <p>Lawmakers and advocacy groups have been calling for the relief, known as temporary protected status. Some have estimated that 28,000 to 30,000 Ukrainians could be eligible for it; the designation gives them permission to stay and work in the United States for 18 months. Often, temporary protected status is extended. In this case, it will not apply to any Ukrainians who entered the country after March 1.</p> <p>"Russia's premeditated and unprovoked attack on Ukraine has resulted in an ongoing war, senseless violence and Ukrainians forced to seek refuge in other countries," Alejandro N. Mayorkas, the homeland security secretary, said in a statement.</p> <p>The Biden administration moved quickly on the designation, even as advocates have been pleading with the government for months to offer similar relief to people from Cameroon, who have faced violence and persecution when they were not granted asylum in the United States and deported.</p> <p>Daniel Tse, the founder of the Cameroon Advocacy Network, said he saw a racial component to the decisions.</p> <p>"It is evidence of anti-blackness and discrimination toward Black immigrants," Mr. Tse said on Thursday, echoing a growing concern among immigration advocates and some lawmakers.</p> <p>The Department of Homeland Security, which decides when to grant temporary protected status in close coordination with the White House, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Previously, Mr. Mayorkas has said that the immigration system treats all migrants equally.</p> <p>Both Republican and Democratic lawmakers have called for the administration to offer the benefit to Ukrainians.</p> <p>"Ukrainian Nationals currently in the United States should not be forced to return to Ukraine while the nation is at war with Russia," Sen. Rob Portman, Republican of Ohio, said on Twitter. "Granting them Temporary Protected Status is the right thing to do."</p> <p>Senator Bob Menendez, Democrat of New Jersey and the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, praised the administration for giving this relief to Ukrainians. But he also urged the White House to designate citizens of Cameroon, Ethiopia and Afghanistan as eligible for the same benefit.</p> <p>"Temporary Protected Status was created by Congress for exactly this purpose — to protect people whose home countries have experienced armed conflict, an environmental disaster or extraordinary conditions that prevent people from safely returning home," Mr. Menendez said in a statement. The program went into effect in 1990.</p> <p>The administration also paused deportations on commercial flights to the region, according to an official who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly. On March 1, three Ukrainians were scheduled for deportation to Kyiv on a commercial flight, the official said. Those three people are now eligible to apply for temporary status.</p>

	<p>More than 1,000 Ukrainians were caught crossing the southwest border of the United States from October to January, a significant increase compared with previous years, according to government data.</p> <p>There are currently more than 400,000 people living in the United States under temporary protected status, including immigrants from Burma, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Yemen.</p> <p>Advocates for limiting immigration have been critical of the program, which they say ultimately lets people who receive the designation stay in the United States permanently.</p> <p>The federal agency that handles applications for the temporary benefit reports about a six-month wait period. Ukrainian immigrants who qualify for the program can also apply for authorization to work in the United States.</p> <p>On Thursday afternoon, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada announced a new program for fleeing Ukrainians to be granted quick, temporary immigration status in the country, which has a large Ukrainian population.</p> <p>His government also announced a special program, through which Ukrainian-Canadians can sponsor family members fleeing Ukraine to settle permanently in Canada.</p> <p>“Ukrainian immigrants have helped build this country, and we stand with the courageous people of Ukraine in upholding the values that our countries share,” the Canadian government’s news release said.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 What is victory for Putin in Ukraine?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/3/what-does-putin-want-lack-clear-endgame-hovers-ove/
GIST	<p>ANALYSIS:</p> <p>The world spent months wondering whether Russian President Vladimir Putin would invade Ukraine.</p> <p>With tanks bearing down on Kyiv and Russian troops now in control of key cities, an equally knotty question has emerged: What does victory look like for Russia’s enigmatic leader?</p> <p>Trying to define Mr. Putin’s ultimate endgame in attacking Ukraine — and how this military campaign will alter the landscape for Europe, the U.S., NATO and the broader international order — have become consuming questions as the war plays out in Kyiv, Kharkiv and other cities across Ukraine.</p> <p>It has become clear that the Kremlin’s immediate goal is to drive Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy from power and install in his place a friendly regime that toes the line on Mr. Putin’s security demands and stays firmly in Russia’s orbit. Such a government would immediately sever Kyiv’s growing ties with the West, end its quest to join NATO, and provide a major shot in the arm for Mr. Putin’s larger ambition to rebuild Russian influence across Eastern Europe and create a buffer against the West.</p> <p>Such a clear-cut victory will be difficult, if not impossible. Russia may be able to topple the Zelenskyy regime, but maintaining full control over Europe’s largest country and its population of 44 million would require a massive, long-term military presence and Soviet-style repression. Mr. Putin already is facing growing protests at home, and the West’s unprecedented economic pressure on Moscow would make the prospects of a drawn-out guerrilla war in Ukraine a tough sell to a Russian population that has shown minimal enthusiasm for the war.</p> <p>Although it can’t defeat Russia in a head-on conflict, the Ukrainian military and its cache of Western weapons are more than capable of wreaking havoc on Moscow in the form of a highly motivated insurgency, inflicting a heavy toll on Mr. Putin’s forces and chipping away at troops’ appetite to fight.</p>

The lack of clarity about Mr. Putin's endgame has fueled talk that he may not have one.

"Russia is now engaged in a war it cannot win," Max Bergmann, a senior fellow at the liberal Center for American Progress, wrote in an analysis Thursday. "Russia's military might be large enough to take the country, but it is not large enough to govern it."

Indeed, any Russian attempt to take over all of Ukraine and govern it as a satellite state harks back to the failed invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s. That campaign exposed the limits of a military as mighty as that of the Soviet Union. More recently, the disastrous end of the U.S. military's 20-year effort to stop another insurgency in Afghanistan offers the Kremlin a second cautionary tale.

With a full Ukrainian surrender seemingly off the table, the two nations are back at the negotiating table. Mr. Zelenskyy on Thursday expressed openness to talking directly with Mr. Putin, raising the possibility of some sort of negotiated settlement.

"What do you want from us? Leave our lands. If you don't want to leave, sit down with me to talk. I'm available. I'm your neighbor, talk to me. What are you afraid of? We don't threaten anyone, we are not terrorists," Mr. Zelenskyy told reporters Thursday.

Mr. Zelenskyy said it's not so much that he wants to talk with Mr. Putin but he probably has to. "The world has to talk with Putin," he said. "There are no other ways to stop this war."

A peace deal, in theory, could include assurances from Ukraine that U.S. and NATO troops won't operate on its soil, or guarantees that Ukraine will never host any long-range missiles or other weapons that could be used to target Russia.

'A new era' for Ukraine

If the two sides don't reach such a deal, the future becomes much murkier. In addition to a slow-burning insurgent war against Russian troops, possibilities include a Ukraine that is cut into two. Some analysts have dubbed that scenario the "Cyprus model," in reference to a split of the country after a Turkish invasion in 1974 to support the Turkish Cypriot population.

In Ukraine, that might mean a Russian-dominated eastern half of Ukraine, representing rump independent states recognized by few countries around the world. An independent Ukrainian government would continue to hold sway in the west.

"Moscow's ideal outcome for Ukraine, should the war come to pass, might be something like the current situation on the island of Cyprus," journalist David Lepeska wrote in a recent piece for The National.

That outcome would achieve at least one of Mr. Putin's goals: to effectively end Ukraine's status as a growing economic and military power in its own right, leaning increasingly to Europe and the West and moving inexorably farther away from Kremlin control.

Mr. Putin, in a string of speeches, essays and even his declaration of war last week, has laid out a set of grievances dating to the fall of the Soviet Union. It includes NATO's expansion across Eastern Europe and the Balkans, the fate of ethnic Russian populations "trapped" in other countries with the Soviet Union's fall, and the "color revolutions" in Ukraine and other countries that he said are trying to topple Kremlin-friendly regimes.

Having rebuilt Russia's military forces after the declines of the 1990s, some analysts say, Mr. Putin feels strong enough to rebuild the great power status of the Soviet Union and force the West to adjust.

The geopolitical fallout would be messy. Few nations outside of close Russian allies such as Belarus and Syria would recognize any Kremlin claim over Ukrainian territory or a Russian puppet state claiming control over a chunk of Ukrainian soil.

The world has largely rejected Mr. Putin's claim to the Crimean Peninsula after Russia's 2014 invasion, and the international community would certainly follow suit if Russia tries to split Ukraine, claim half of it or embark on any other path that ends the democratically elected Zelenskyy presidency.

For the West, each result carries its own risks. If Russia is defeated or bogged down by a bloody insurgency, Mr. Putin could lash out with something more drastic. The erratic Russian leader this week put his nuclear forces on high alert, stoking fear that he may dramatically escalate the situation if his forces can't secure a quick victory.

As recently as Thursday, Mr. Putin laid out that vision in a 90-minute phone call with French President Emmanuel Macron. According to aides, Mr. Macron ended the phone call convinced that Mr. Putin was determined to take control of all of Ukraine, whatever the hurdles or consequences.

"There is nothing in what President Putin said that should reassure us," a French official told reporters.

Should Russian forces take Kyiv and depose Mr. Zelenskyy, the U.S. and NATO almost certainly would reject any Moscow-backed government. Under such a scenario, the West could recognize Mr. Zelenskyy or another leader who takes his place as the head of a Ukrainian government in exile with headquarters elsewhere in Europe. The prospect of Ukrainian resistance forces based in neighboring NATO countries carrying out a guerrilla war against the Russian puppet government is just one more nightmare scenario for Western planners.

The Biden administration, which has staunchly rejected the idea of U.S. forces fighting in Ukraine, hasn't entertained questions about a Russian military victory. Foreign policy specialists say such an outcome would be chilling and would raise the danger of conflict between Russia and the West. The U.S. and its allies also would have to decide whether to continue their massive economic sanctions campaign on Russia or relax measures over time if the fighting stops.

"If Russia gains control of Ukraine or manages to destabilize it on a major scale, a new era for the United States and for Europe will begin. U.S. and European leaders would face the dual challenge of rethinking European security and of not being drawn into a larger war with Russia," Liana Fix, a resident fellow at the German Marshall Fund, and Michael Kimmage, a history professor at the Catholic University of America, wrote in a recent piece for Foreign Affairs magazine.

"All sides would have to consider the potential of nuclear-armed adversaries in direct confrontation. These two responsibilities — robustly defending European peace and prudently avoiding military escalation with Russia — will not necessarily be compatible," they wrote.

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HEADLINE	03/03 Russia advances in Ukraine south
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/3/russia-advances-ukraines-south-us-widens-sanctions/
GIST	<p>Russian and Ukrainian officials tentatively agreed to create "humanitarian corridors" to evacuate citizens from combat zones, but they failed to reach any major cease-fire Thursday as Russia's military pushed deeper into Ukraine, battling to control a key electricity-producing hub in the south and gaining ground toward severing the country's access to the Black Sea.</p> <p>President Biden announced that the U.S. was widening the number of Russian oligarchs to target for economic sanctions springing from the Kremlin's decision to invade. He said he was working with European and other allies around the world to freeze the assets of a growing circle of wealthy Russian elites with ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin.</p>

Mr. Putin ignored the development. He said in a short speech to the nation that the week-old invasion was proceeding “according to schedule,” despite signs that Moscow’s ground advance on Ukraine’s capital in the north has apparently stalled. A huge armored column was at a standstill outside Kyiv, and Ukrainian forces were putting up an unexpectedly tough fight against a larger and better-armed Russian army.

The Russians, however, have brought their superior firepower to bear in recent days and launched hundreds of missiles and artillery attacks on cities across Ukraine. Kyiv confirmed that the southern city of Kherson had fallen, making the Black Sea port of 280,000 people the first major city fully seized by Russian forces.

Russian troops also made significant ground gains along Ukraine’s southern coastline toward a goal of cutting Kyiv’s access to the Black and Azov seas. Such a development would deal a major blow to Ukraine’s economy and allow Russia to build a land corridor to the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow seized in 2014.

A senior U.S. defense official said on the condition of anonymity that the Crimea annexation gave Russia a logistical advantage with shorter supply lines that smoothed the Russian military’s offensive in that part of Ukraine.

Heavy fighting also continued on the outskirts of another strategic port, Mariupol, on the Azov Sea, plunging it into darkness, knocking out most phone service and raising the prospect of food and water shortages.

Russia has fired more than 480 missiles, the senior U.S. defense official said. Ukrainian officials said their missile defense systems have parried numerous attacks, and Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said explosions overnight in the capital were Russian missiles being shot down.

Kyiv has stared down the Russian aggression by calling on Ukrainians to rise up and wage a guerrilla war against the invaders.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his countrymen are not afraid of anything and will continue to resist the Russian invaders. “Russia wants to crush us, to erase us, but we are still standing,” Mr. Zelenskyy said in televised remarks. “We are resisting. The whole world is helping us.”

Still, the Ukrainian president said he wants peace and appealed to the world to pressure Moscow to engage in talks toward ending what now amounts to the biggest attack by one nation against another in Europe since World War II. “The world has to talk with Putin,” Mr. Zelenskyy said. “There are no other ways to stop this war.”

Small-scale protests simmered in Russian cities, and high-profile artists, scholars, athletes and chess players publicly condemned the war. Still, Mr. Putin insisted the week-old invasion was unfolding according to plan.

“The special military operation is going strictly according to schedule,” Mr. Putin said at the start of a meeting in Moscow with his security council. The Russian president said “we are at war with neo-Nazis.” At the start of the invasion, he falsely claimed that one goal was the “de-nazification” of Ukraine’s leadership under Mr. Zelenskyy.

Western analysts have criticized Mr. Putin for promoting deliberate disinformation about Mr. Zelenskyy, who is Jewish.

Mr. Putin separately praised Russian forces and announced that the Kremlin would pay compensation to families of Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine. Russia reported Wednesday that 498 of its troops had been killed. Although the actual number is not clear, Ukrainian officials reported it as far higher.

U.N. officials said Thursday that the number of Ukrainians who had fled to Poland, Moldova and other neighboring countries topped 1 million, with more possibly on the way.

‘Nothing to reassure us’

Mr. Putin held a lengthy phone call Thursday with French President Emmanuel Macron. Afterward, a Macron aide told the Agence France-Presse news agency that the French president heard “nothing that could reassure us” from Mr. Putin and that “the worst is still to come” in Ukraine.

Ukrainian and Russian delegations met for a tense second round of talks in neighboring Belarus. The two sides had little common ground going into the meeting. The Kremlin warned Ukraine that it must quickly accept the Kremlin’s demand for “demilitarization,” declare itself neutral and renounce any bid to join NATO.

Both delegations emerged saying they had agreed to establish tentative cease-fires in areas designated as “humanitarian corridors” inside Ukraine to evacuate civilians from combat zones. The apparent goal is to establish pathways for civilians to escape and facilitate the delivery of food and medicine to areas hit by the heaviest fighting.

Those in the embattled capital faced another grim day. In Kyiv, snow gave way to a cold, gray drizzle as long lines formed outside the few pharmacies and bakeries that remained open.

Russian forces battled for control of the southern city of Enerhodar, a crucial energy-producing hub on the Dnieper River that accounts for about one-quarter of Ukraine’s power generation. The mayor of Enerhodar, the site of the biggest nuclear plant in Europe, said Ukrainian forces were battling Russian troops on the city’s outskirts. Video showed flames and clouds of black smoke rising above the city of more than 50,000. People streamed away from the inferno past wrecked cars as sirens wailed.

Despite a profusion of evidence of civilian casualties and destruction of property by the Russian military, some of it documented by journalists and human rights groups, Mr. Putin decried an “anti-Russian disinformation campaign” and insisted that Moscow uses “only precision weapons to exclusively destroy military infrastructure.”

The U.S. and its allies have avoided a direct military confrontation with Russia. Instead, it has responded to the invasion by channeling more weaponry to Ukrainian forces while implementing a massive economic sanctions campaign against the Russian state and political elites who back the autocratic Putin government.

Targeting oligarchs

Mr. Biden announced that the U.S. had leveled a fresh slate of sanctions directly targeting Russian oligarchs with ties to Mr. Putin. Notable targets of the sanctions included Alisher Burhanovich Usmanov, a wealthy Russian whose yacht was just seized by German authorities, and Dmitry Peskov, Mr. Putin’s high-profile spokesman at the Kremlin.

“We continue to impose very severe economic sanctions on Putin and all those folks around him,” Mr. Biden said at the start of a Cabinet meeting.

Administration officials said 19 Russian oligarchs and 47 of their family members will face visa restrictions from the State Department. A White House fact sheet said “the United States and governments all over the world will work to identify and freeze the assets Russian elites and their family members hold in our respective jurisdictions – their yachts, luxury apartments, money and other ill-gotten gains.”

“These individuals have enriched themselves at the expense of the Russian people, and some have elevated their family members into high-ranking positions. Others sit atop Russia’s largest companies and

are responsible for providing the resources necessary to support Putin's invasion of Ukraine," the fact sheet said.

"We want [Mr. Putin] to feel the squeeze," White House spokesman Jen Psaki told reporters. "We want the people around him to feel the squeeze. I don't believe this is going to be the last set of oligarchs" to be sanctioned.

The U.S. and allies also issued sanctions on 26 Russia and Ukraine-based people who play central roles in spreading disinformation about the invasion.

"These entities have spread false narratives that advance Russian strategic objectives and falsely justify the Kremlin's activities," the White House fact sheet said.

Some Russian oligarchs have come out in opposition to the war, including billionaire tycoon Oleg Deripaska, who had been sanctioned by Western nations.

On Thursday, Mr. Deripaska said on the Telegram social media site, "Peace is very important! It is insane to prolong negotiations!" He warned that potential damage to Ukraine's nuclear power facilities as a result of the combat could endanger lives not only in Ukraine but also Europe as a whole.

"Any incident involving those objects will be remembered by our successors in Russia, Ukraine and Europe for some 200 years to come," Mr. Deripaska wrote, according to an account by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, a U.S. government-backed news outlet.

Mr. Deripaska is the latest in a number of Russian oligarchs, now targets of sanctions from the West, who are calling for an end to the invasion of Ukraine. Others on the list include billionaires Mikhail Fridman, Pyotr Aven, Oleg Tinkov and Aleksei Mordashov, the outlet reported.

Mr. Zelenskyy appealed in a press conference for face-to-face talks with Mr. Putin. He joked that they should not be separated by a 30-foot table as other Western leaders have been on recent Kremlin visits. He excoriated NATO nations for refusing to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine to challenge Russian air superiority.

"If you do not have the power to close the skies, then give me planes," Mr. Zelenskyy said at one point.

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HEADLINE	03/03 Russia: captured foreign fighters not POWs
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/3/russia-says-foreigners-caught-fighting-ukraine-won/
GIST	<p>Any foreigners captured while fighting on behalf of Ukraine in their war against Russia won't receive the type of Geneva Convention protections accorded to soldiers in combat, Kremlin officials said Thursday.</p> <p>Russia considers any foreign volunteers answering Ukraine's call for help as mercenaries and officials in Moscow said they would be "brought to justice."</p> <p>"At best, they can expect to be prosecuted as criminals," Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said, according to the official Tass news agency.</p> <p>He accused foreign mercenaries of attacking the Russian military and supply convoys taking part in President Vladimir Putin's week-old invasion of neighboring Ukraine. Mr. Konashenkov said such "acts of sabotage" are being carried out with weapons supplied by the West.</p> <p>"None of the mercenaries the West is sending to Ukraine to fight for the nationalist regime in Kyiv can be considered as combatants in accordance with international humanitarian law or enjoy the status of prisoners of war," Mr. Konashenkov said, according to Tass.</p>

	<p>As to why there isn't a rash of videos of the foreign volunteers on social media sites, he said the mercenaries prefer not to get in front of the cameras.</p> <p>"We are urging all foreign citizens who may have plans to go and fight for Kyiv's nationalist regime to think a dozen times before getting on the way," Mr. Konashenkov said.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials have lodged their own charges that Russian mercenaries are assisting in the invasion. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy earlier this week said the Russian private security firm The Wagner Group had hired mercenaries to try to assassinate him and other top figures in the Ukrainian government.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Demand falls, states hold vaccine stockpile
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/3/as-vaccine-demand-falls-states-are-left-with-huge-/
GIST	<p>As demand for COVID-19 vaccines collapses in many areas of the U.S., states are scrambling to use stockpiles of doses before they expire and have to be added to the millions that have already gone to waste.</p> <p>From some of the least vaccinated states, like Indiana and North Dakota, to some of the most vaccinated states, like New Jersey and Vermont, public health departments are shuffling doses around in the hopes of finding providers that can use them.</p> <p>State health departments told The Associated Press they have tracked millions of doses that went to waste, including ones that expired, were in a multi-dose vial that couldn't be used completely or had to be tossed for some other reason like temperature issues or broken vials.</p> <p>Nearly 1.5 million doses in Michigan, 1.45 million in North Carolina, 1 million in Illinois and almost 725,000 doses in Washington couldn't be used.</p> <p>The percentage of wasted doses in California is only about 1.8%, but in a state that has received 84 million doses and administered more than 71 million of them, that equates to roughly 1.4 million doses. Providers there are asked to keep doses until they expire, then properly dispose of them, the California Department of Public Health said.</p> <p>The problem is not unique to the U.S. More than a million doses of the Russian Sputnik vaccine expired this week in Guatemala, because nobody wanted to take the shot.</p> <p>Vaccination program managers say that tossing out doses is inevitable in any inoculation campaign because of the difficulty in aligning supply and demand for a product with a limited shelf life.</p> <p>But the coronavirus pandemic has killed nearly 6 million people and shattered economies across the globe, and every dose that goes to waste feels like a missed opportunity considering how successful the vaccines are in preventing death and serious disease.</p> <p>It also comes only about a year after people desperate to get the vaccine attempted to jump in line to get ahead of those deemed higher priority. Hospital board members, their trustees and donors around the U.S. got early access or offers for vaccinations, raising complaints about favoritism and inequity at a time when the developing world had virtually no doses.</p> <p>And many poorer nations still have low vaccine rates, including 13 countries in Africa with less than 5% of their population fully vaccinated. They are plagued by unpredictable deliveries, weak health care systems, vaccine hesitancy and some supply issues, although health officials say inventory is markedly stronger than earlier in the pandemic.</p> <p>In fact, supplies are so strong that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now advises doctors that it's OK to discard doses if it means opening up the standard multi-dose vials to vaccinate a single person and the rest has to be tossed.</p>

“Pivoting to what’s happening now, you have much more production and distribution to low-income countries,” said Dr. Joseph Bresee, who directs the COVID-19 Vaccine Implementation Program at the Task Force for Global Health in Decatur, Georgia. “The issue of some stockpiles in the U.S., Germany and Japan, that are not redistributed to sub-Saharan Africa, it’s less of an acute problem now because vaccine production and distribution is in high-gear right now serving those low-income countries.”

The Department of Health and Human Services also said that redistributing states’ excess doses to other nations is not feasible because of the difficulty in transporting the shots, which must remain cold, in addition to not being cost effective because of the relatively small number concentrated at sites.

Of the 688 million doses sent to states, 550 million to 600 million have been administered, HHS said Monday. The vaccines authorized in the U.S., made by Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson, can last for up to about six months from the time of manufacture.

A senior HHS official familiar with vaccine distribution plans would not say how many doses nationwide have already been marked as wastage, stating that there were too many variables to effectively calculate a nationwide rate and that states would have the most accurate figures. The official took issue with the word “wastage,” saying it implies mismanagement when states are effectively overseeing their inventories.

The CDC, however, uses the term “wastage” on its website and asks states to report their numbers. The agency did not reply to requests for those figures.

The average number of Americans getting their first shot is down to about 70,000 a day, the lowest point since the U.S. vaccination campaign began in December 2020. About 76% of the U.S. population has received at least one shot and roughly 65% of all Americans are fully vaccinated.

With demand so low, states will undoubtedly be confronted with more waste in the months ahead, although they will benefit from any booster expansions.

Idaho, for example, has 230,000 doses on hand but is only averaging fewer than 2,000 doses administered a week.

Oregon’s vaccination rate is slightly higher than the national average, but the health authority there said last week that they have “significant excess vaccine on hand” because of the recent drop in demand. The state is trying to use up as many of the 716,000 doses in its inventory as possible.

Rhode Island has the highest percentage of residents who are fully vaccinated in the nation, at slightly more than 80%, but the health department reported having 137,000 doses on hand last week. Health officials say they need them for a big push to increase the vaccination rate for booster doses.

Health officials in some states have developed “matchmaker” programs to connect vaccine providers with excess doses with providers seeking doses. Many said they’re attempting to redistribute doses with expiration dates that are quickly approaching. New Jersey has a task force that has transferred more than 600,000 doses around the state since June. West Virginia has offered to transfer Pfizer adult doses to nearby states.

Immunization managers have been asking for single-dose vials, especially for pediatricians, but it may not work for manufacturers to package it that way yet, said Claire Hannan, executive director at the Association of Immunization Managers. She said wasting vaccine “just can’t be an issue.”

“We tell this to providers, but the most important thing is getting people vaccinated. And that’s hard when the demand goes down. You don’t have constant flow,” she said. “But that’s just a necessary evil I guess.”

	<p>HHS said states are ordering prudently, paralleling the drop in demand. The minimum order for Pfizer used to be nearly 1,200 doses but now it's 100, and Moderna reduced the number of doses per vial, the agency said.</p> <p>"Given what we've seen in terms of the number of people still unvaccinated, I do think finding any way to get the shot in arms, even at the expense of potential wastage, is still important," said Katie Greene, an assistant research director at the Duke-Margolis Center for Health Policy.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/04 Demoralized Russia soldiers angry, 'duped'
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/04/russian-soldiers-ukraine-anger-duped-into-war
GIST	<p>Five Russian soldiers sit in a brick building. They are blindfolded: the latest prisoners to be captured inside Ukraine. A Ukrainian voice interrogates them. "Speak," he says to the group's Russian officer. What message would he like to send to his soldiers and to Russians back at home?</p> <p>"Frankly speaking, they tricked us," the officer replies, referring to his military superiors sitting in Moscow. "Everything we were told was a fake. I would tell my guys to leave Ukrainian territory. We've got families and children. I think 90% of us would agree to go home."</p> <p>The three-minute video was filmed under conditions of duress. The soldiers are evidently scared. And yet there are numerous similar interviews with Russian captives which have been circulating on Ukrainian social media channels, expressing similar sentiments.</p> <p>Asked what he would tell his commanders, one said bluntly: "They are faggots". Another phrase frequently used is oni obmanuli nas: they duped us. Eight days after Vladimir Putin's invasion it is clear that a significant number of his servicemen are demoralised and reluctant to fight. Some have given themselves up.</p> <p>Others have abandoned their vehicles and have set off back towards the Russian border on foot, lugging their weapons and kitbags, videos suggest. These episodes do not mean that the Kremlin will fail in its attempts to conquer Ukraine, as its tactics shift to brutal shelling of civilians.</p> <p>But low morale among invading troops might be one reason why Russia's blitzkrieg plan to overwhelm Ukraine appears not to have progressed at the speed Putin would have wanted. The assumption in Moscow was that the operation would be swift and successful. Soldiers were given food and fuel supplies for only two or three days, the videos suggest.</p> <p>The Kremlin also appears to have had a totally fantastical idea of the reception they would get. Several prisoners of war said they had been assured Ukrainians would welcome them as liberators. Russian forces were expecting flowers and cheers, not bullets and bombs, they said.</p> <p>"Some of them thought they were on military exercises. They didn't anticipate resistance," Artem Mazhulin, a 31-year-old English teacher from Kharkiv said. "A lot are conscripts born in 2002 or 2003. We are talking about 19-year-old and 20-year-old boys."</p> <p>He added: "Since 2014 the Russian government has been brainwashing its population with propaganda. They try and make Russia believe Ukraine is not a real country and say fascist monsters have captured it."</p> <p>Mazhulin said his uncle and aunt, Viktor and Valentina, had talked with Russian soldiers when they rolled past their house in Kupiansk, in north-east Ukraine, close to the border. The soldiers explained they were looking for Banderivtsi, or followers of the second world war Ukrainian nationalist leader Stepan Bandera.</p> <p>"My uncle said to them: 'Where the fuck do you see Banderivtsi?' My aunt told them to get off her flowerbeds," Mazhulin recounted. "They called my uncle Batya (Dad) and chatted with him about pigeon breeding, his hobby. Then they drove off on their tank."</p>

In a video address on Thursday Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskyy pressed home the same message: that Putin has sent his invading forces into Ukraine without an understandable mission. "They are demoralised. They are doomed," he said, telling enemy soldiers to "go home".

Ukraine claims to have killed several thousand Russian troops. This figure may be an exaggeration, but on Wednesday, however, even the Kremlin admitted 498 of its servicemen had died, with 1,591 wounded.

Alex Kovzhun, a one-time adviser to Ukraine's former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, said Russian soldiers could be divided into two sorts: "There are the young conscripts who are scared shitless. And there are career guys who have fought in Syria and the Donbas."

Kovzhun said the Russian general staff had thought the invasion would be "easy peasy", and a repeat of the operations to seize Crimea in 2014, or their recent deployment to Kazakhstan, which were largely unopposed. Instead, Ukrainian civilians had stood in front of enemy tanks, blocked armoured columns with their bare hands and had sung the national anthem in front of twitchy Russian guards.

"They shout expletives in front of armed people. I've seen the Russian faces. They are very uncomfortable because it's not what they expected. They were told Ukrainians were imprisoned by mythic Nazis," he added.

Nick Reynolds, a research analyst for land warfare at the defence and security think tank the Royal United Services Institute (Rusi), said the Ukrainian figure for killed enemy soldiers was likely to be a more reliable than the Russian estimate, adding that the footage of engagements involving Russian forces available online suggested the toll the Kremlin was willing to admit to had already been exceeded.

Nevertheless, he added, there is little to show how the Ukrainian authorities have arrived at their own total. The several thousand dead tally could itself be a slight exaggeration, he said.

There is no doubt Ukraine is utilising the discomfort of captured soldiers for propaganda purposes. Several videos show young men calling their mothers back in Russia, who have no idea their sons are fighting in Ukraine. The mothers typically break down. The Ukrainian authorities have opened a hotline for worried Russian relatives, in another PR scoop.

Nonetheless, there is an authentic sense that many Russian servicemen regret ever having come to Ukraine, a journey that has ended for some in death or disillusionment. One interrogator asks a prisoner: "So, what do you think, are you soldiers of the strong Russian army or cannon fodder?"

"We are cannon fodder," the PoW replies.

"Was it worth it?" the interrogator says, by way of follow-up.

"No," the prisoner says.

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HEADLINE	03/04 Day 9 of the Russian invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/04/war-in-ukraine-what-we-know-on-day-nine-of-the-russian-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Russian troops have seized Europe's largest nuclear plant at Zaporizhzhia after a fire sparked by heavy shelling, Ukrainian authorities said. No changes in radiation had been recorded but any loss of ability to cool nuclear fuel would lead to "significant radioactive emissions" that could "outgrow all previous nuclear power plant accidents", they said.• The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Mariano Grossi, offered to travel to Ukraine to facilitate talks with Russia aimed at guaranteeing the safety of nuclear plants during the conflict. The situation "continues to be extremely tense and challenging," he said.

- **The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, appealed directly to Russians to stage protests** over the seizure of nuclear power infrastructure by Russian troops. “Russian people, I want to appeal to you: how is this possible?” he said. “After all, we fought together in 1986 against the Chernobyl catastrophe.”
- **Zelenskiy earlier accused Russia of “nuclear terror”**, as British PM Boris Johnson said Putin’s forces were “reckless”. The blaze has sparked deep concern over the fate of Ukraine’s nuclear plants amid the worsening fighting.
- **US president Joe Biden and Canada’s prime minister Justin Trudeau also condemned Russia for shelling the plant** and starting the blaze, which took hold in a training building on the site’s perimeter.
- **Russia’s defence ministry blamed the attack on the nuclear plant on Ukrainian saboteurs**, calling it a “monstrous provocation”.
- **The death toll from Russian airstrikes in a residential district of the city of Chernihiv rose to 47**, regional authorities said. Rescue work had to be suspended due to heavy shelling, according to the local emergency services.
- **Russia’s parliament passed a law imposing a jail term of up to 15 years** for spreading intentionally “fake” information about the armed forces.
- **Russia admitted to “limiting” access to news websites** including the BBC, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the independent Russian site Meduza and Germany’s Deutsche Welle, with Facebook also blocked.
- **Ukraine and Russia agreed to create humanitarian corridors to evacuate civilians in a second round of talks on Thursday**, but the Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said the [outcome of the talks had fallen short of Ukraine’s hopes](#). A third round of talks is set to take place next week.
- **Russian forces were in control of local and regional government buildings in the strategically important Black Sea port of Kherson, local authorities said.** Russian forces [appeared to be moving to cut Ukraine off from the sea](#) via its key southern ports, claiming the capture of Kherson and tightening the siege of Mariupol.
- **Concern is mounting over the movements of a huge column of Russian military vehicles outside Kyiv.** While a US defence official suggested it appeared to have “stalled”, [there was also speculation](#) that an estimated 15,000 troops attached to it may be regrouping and waiting for logistical supplies before an assault on the Ukrainian capital.
- **Vladimir Putin told Emmanuel Macron that Kyiv’s “refusal to accept Russia’s conditions” means he will continue to pursue his war in Ukraine**, France’s presidential Élysée Palace said, adding: [“We expect the worst is yet to come.”](#)
- **In a televised speech shortly after his 90-minute call with Macron on Thursday, Putin claimed Russian military operations in Ukraine were going according to plan.** The president went on to accuse Ukrainian forces of using civilians as “human shields” [but provided no evidence](#).
- **The UK foreign secretary, Liz Truss, imposed sanctions on the Uzbekistan-born Russian billionaire Alisher Usmanov**, whose commercial links to Everton football club [have been suspended](#); and on the Russian former deputy prime minister Igor Shuvalov, the Foreign Office has said.
- **The Pentagon has established communication with the Russian defence ministry “for the purpose of preventing miscalculation, military incidents, and escalation”**, a US defence official told the AP. That such a “deconfliction” line has been established was not yet officially announced, but multiple news organisations confirmed the news. The line was reportedly established on 1 March.

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HEADLINE	03/03 NFL drops all Covid protocols immediately
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/sports/football/nfl-covid-protocol.html
GIST	The N.F.L. and the N.F.L. Players Association agreed to suspend all Covid-19 protocols, effective immediately, returning teams and players to pre-pandemic operations for the first time since March 2020.

The N.F.L., which is not in season, is the first of the United States' major professional sports leagues to halt its coronavirus-related policies.

Players and team staff members will no longer be required to wear masks inside facilities, adhere to social distancing measures or restrict access within team buildings based on vaccination or job function, according to a memo sent to all 32 teams on Thursday, though each team will have to comply with local ordinances governing mask mandates.

Teams are expected to provide an area where P.C.R. tests can be run on-site for anyone who self-reports coronavirus symptoms, but there will be no mandatory testing cadence. Those who test positive will be required to isolate for five days, as per current recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The memo cited "encouraging trends" regarding the prevalence and severity of Covid-19 cases, evolving guidance from the C.D.C. and changes to state laws as reasons for the change.

New case numbers and hospitalizations [have fallen sharply](#) from the nationwide peak in January. The N.F.L. said in the memo that it would work with the players' union and medical experts to monitor whether protocols needed to be reimposed in full or in part.

Zachary Binney, a sports epidemiologist at Oxford College of Emory University in Georgia, said the league's decision was largely in accordance with revised C.D.C. guidelines, though he added that the federal agency's guidelines still supported indoor mask usage in high-risk areas.

A PGA Tour spokesperson said the circuit would return next week to pre-pandemic access to facilities including the locker room, dining room and fitness area. The tour discontinued testing last summer for players and caddies unless they were symptomatic, but still had limited other staff and visitors' access to the mainly indoor facilities used by players. The N.B.A. and the N.H.L. are among the leagues that relaxed, but did not eliminate, their protocols in January.

The [N.F.L. had a surge of cases](#) during the rise of the Omicron variant in the United States, with more than 1,200 positive tests recorded among players and staff from Dec. 12 to Jan. 8. But the league did not report any positive tests between the divisional round playoff games and the Super Bowl. In the final weeks of the 2021 season, the league dropped testing of asymptomatic players, regardless of vaccination status.

Nearly 95 percent of players and close to 100 percent of team personnel were vaccinated, according to the N.F.L. The league [mandated in December](#) that all team staff members who were in close contact with players receive a booster shot. Last month, the league said only about 10 percent of players had been boosted, but that number may have gone up since the end of the season.

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HEADLINE	03/03 CDC: 90% population can ease masking
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/03/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#the-cdc-releases-new-data-suggesting-that-90-percent-of-americans-can-ease-masking
GIST	<p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released updated data on Thursday that suggests 90 percent of the U.S. population are in a location with low or medium Covid-19 community levels — meaning under the agency's new guidance those Americans can now stop wearing masks and no longer need to social distance or avoid crowded indoor spaces.</p> <p>That figure is up from 70 percent last week, when the C.D.C. announced its new strategy of assessing coronavirus community levels to help return the country to some version of normal life.</p> <p>But even before the C.D.C. shared updated guidance, cities and states were quickly shedding mask mandates as cases of the Omicron variant declined and calls for relaxed measures grew louder.</p>

	<p>The recommendations no longer rely only on the number of cases in a community to determine the need for restrictions such as mask wearing. Instead, they direct counties to consider three measures to assess risk of the virus: new Covid-related hospital admissions over the previous week, the percentage of hospital beds occupied by Covid patients, and new coronavirus cases per 100,000 people over the previous week.</p> <p>Based on these three factors, counties can calculate whether the risk to their residents is low, medium or high, according to the agency, and only areas of high risk should require everyone to wear a mask. But unvaccinated people should wear masks even in low-risk areas, the agency said.</p> <p>While much of the country is now categorized in low or medium risk, much of West Virginia and large swaths of Kentucky, Virginia, Nebraska and Montana remain at a high risk according to the C.D.C. data.</p> <p>West Virginia is averaging just under 700 daily new cases, according to a New York Times database, but is seeing a decline in hospitalizations in most counties. Among the communities considered high risk in the state is Kanawha County, which includes Charleston, the capital.</p> <p>But Gov. Jim Justice of West Virginia said in a news conference on Wednesday that “we don’t want to completely drop our guard by any stretch, but it’s starting to feel like we are really, really getting out of this.” The governor also said the National Guard will complete its mission of providing additional staffing at hospitals throughout the state next week.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Rural areas fall further behind in vax rates
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/03/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#rural-areas-in-the-us-fall-further-behind-in-vaccination-rates-the-cdc-reports
GIST	<p>Rural parts of the United States have fallen even further behind urban areas in vaccinating people against Covid-19 since all adults became eligible for vaccines, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported on Thursday, making it more difficult to reduce the death toll in those areas.</p> <p>The gap has become especially pronounced among children who are eligible for vaccines, with vaccination rates for 5- to 11-year-olds twice as high in urban areas as in rural ones.</p> <p>The C.D.C. study did not closely examine why the divide has grown. But one reason is clear: an enormous partisan gap. Vaccination rates tend to be markedly lower in counties where a majority of residents voted to re-elect former President Donald J. Trump in 2020.</p> <p>As a result, Covid has taken a devastating toll on the most Republican parts of the country since the Delta variant began circulating, killing people there at far higher rates than in places where Mr. Trump was unpopular.</p> <p>The number of Americans dying each day from Covid has fallen in recent weeks as Omicron cases have plummeted. But the daily death toll remains nearly as high as it was during the worst days of the Delta surge, with more than 1,800 people now dying on average per day.</p> <p>The C.D.C. study examined how many people in almost all U.S. counties had received at least a first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines or a single dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine by the end of January 2022.</p> <p>In rural areas, vaccination coverage among people at least five years old was 59 percent, compared with 75 percent in urban counties. That gap was more than twice as high as it was among American adults in April 2021, before eligibility was widened to include all adults, the C.D.C. said.</p> <p>In addition to problems overcoming partisan resistance to vaccines, C.D.C. scientists said that many rural areas suffered from inadequate access to health care.</p>

	<p>Pediatricians in urban areas also appear to be encouraging vaccination more than their counterparts in rural areas: Nearly 40 percent of rural parents have reported that their child's doctor did not recommend a Covid vaccine, compared with 8 percent of parents in urban areas, the C.D.C. said. Children from 5 to 11 became eligible for vaccines in November.</p> <p>But coverage of booster doses is lagging in urban and rural areas alike, the C.D.C. reported. Roughly 50 percent of those eligible for a booster shot or additional dose had received one in both urban and rural counties.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Los Angeles Co. lifts indoor mask mandate
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/03/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#los-angeles-county-will-lift-its-indoor-mask-mandate-on-friday
GIST	<p>Los Angeles County will lift nearly all of its indoor mask and vaccine verification requirements, local officials announced on Thursday.</p> <p>Starting on Friday, masks will no longer be mandatory in public settings like grocery stores, restaurants and bars. And proof of vaccination or negative test results will no longer be necessary to enter indoor bars, wineries or most other businesses.</p> <p>California state rules still require proof of vaccination or negative test results to enter large indoor events, as well as masks on transit and in other high-risk settings, including hospitals.</p> <p>Dr. Barbara Ferrer, the county's public health director, cited new federal guidelines for measuring risk in communities in her office's decision to remove restrictions sooner than expected. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's updated measures, she said, Los Angeles County is in the low-risk category.</p> <p>Still, Dr. Ferrer said that masks were strongly recommended, and individual businesses could opt to keep in place requirements.</p> <p>"Covid-19 is a deadly virus, and it's still with us — it ebbs and flows," she said. "We need to take advantage of the good times we're about to be in, where we're seeing much less risk across the board for so many, and be prepared, should we see a new variant."</p> <p>Although the city of Los Angeles will, for the time being, still require bars, restaurants and many other indoor businesses to check vaccine status, the moment marks a major symbolic milestone for Angelenos who have weathered some of the nation's deadliest surges and have lived under some of the nation's most enduring restrictions.</p> <p>Dr. Ferrer has been a particular voice of caution, even as her department has faced frustration from residents who believed stringent rules were unnecessary.</p> <p>In recent weeks, though, Dr. Ferrer, along with other public health officials across the country, has shifted her focus toward measures to prevent surges, hospitalizations and deaths.</p> <p>She said the county would continue to help residents get vaccinated, and that her department would continue to track case data closely to intervene before outbreaks at schools or businesses spiral out of control. Dr. Ferrer emphasized that the county would work to ensure that all communities have equitable access to therapeutics for people who get sick with Covid-19.</p> <p>On Monday, the governors of California, Oregon and Washington jointly announced that on March 12, they would lift statewide mask requirements in schools, which were some of the last remaining statewide restrictions. And California officials lifted a mask mandate for unvaccinated people in indoor public spaces on Tuesday.</p>

HEADLINE	03/03 Peace Corps back to overseas service
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/03/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#peace-corps-will-begin-returning-volunteers-to-overseas-service-beginning-in-zambia-and-the-dominican-republic
GIST	<p>The Peace Corps announced on Thursday the return of volunteers to overseas service, after nearly two years of domestic deployments of volunteers and a virtual service program.</p> <p>In March 2020, for the first time in the U.S. agency's nearly 60-year history, the Peace Corps temporarily suspended its operations and evacuated more than 7,000 volunteers from posts in more than 60 countries.</p> <p>But later this month, the organization will send initial cohorts composed of new volunteers and volunteers who were evacuated in 2020 to Zambia and the Dominican Republic. Their focus will be on what initially sent some of them home: Covid-19 response and recovery.</p> <p>The Peace Corps first sent a small group of 21 volunteers to the Dominican Republic nearly 60 years ago in the summer of 1962. A similar number will return this month.</p> <p>The organization is an independent agency of the U.S. government that was created by President John F. Kennedy in 1961. The Peace Corps sends volunteers abroad to help with social and economic development projects — meaning the volunteers dig wells, teach in schools and train people in everything from sewing to breastfeeding.</p> <p>“Over the past two years, our primary goal has been to return volunteers to the more than 60 countries that are enthusiastically awaiting their return,” CEO Carol Spahn said at a virtual event held on Thursday. “We have weathered the waves and variants of the Covid-19 situation at each post and re-engineered Peace Corps systems, policies and procedures to align with today’s reality.”</p> <p>The volunteers deployed in Zambia will engage with communities to provide education about the coronavirus and promote access to vaccines. Those in the Dominican Republic will support communities to overcome challenges that were exacerbated by the pandemic, like helping to recover literacy skills, addressing increased school dropout rates, and preparing young adults for the work force.</p> <p>About 50 volunteers in total make up the two initial cohorts, and though it is a far cry from the typical 3,500 people deployed globally during prepandemic years, Peace Corps officials have ambitions to send increasingly more eager volunteers internationally.</p> <p>“We’re going to do it as quick as we can because we know that those communities want us to go back,” said Scott Beale, associate director for global operations. He added: “We won’t do it any quicker than it’s safe.”</p> <p>The organization has targeted communities in Africa and Latin America for the initial returning deployments because of the regions’ reliable medical evacuation points. “Ecuador, for example, is on queue for next month,” said Beale.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Hong Kong ambulance service devastated
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/03/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#ambulance-wait-times-are-as-long-as-a-day-in-hong-kong-amid-omicron-surge
GIST	<p>Waiting for an ambulance in Hong Kong can take more than a day as the city reels from a surge in Omicron cases and its hospitals, doctors and nurses are stretched thin.</p>

One third of Hong Kong's ambulance workers have tested positive for the coronavirus or are isolating because they are close contacts of positive cases. That's nearly 1,000 employees, said Saphine Yip at the Fire Services Department.

The longest wait time for an ambulance was a day and 15 hours, she said.

Officials are battling the city's worst coronavirus outbreak, with 56,827 cases reported on Thursday. The city has recorded 1,153 deaths since the Omicron variant began to spread in January, and the majority of deaths have been among the older people who are not vaccinated.

For much of the pandemic, Hong Kong avoided massive outbreaks by employing tough border controls and social distancing rules. For the better part of the last two years, officials recorded single- or double-digit daily cases, and most of those were considered imported cases from travelers who had recently arrived in Hong Kong and were still in quarantine.

Once a model for how to control a pandemic, Hong Kong is becoming a cautionary tale, with scenes that recall the earliest — and most fearful — days of the pandemic. Hospitals have run out of beds in isolation wards and are operating at near [full occupancy rate](#) and dead bodies have piled up in hospital hallways because of [limited manpower](#) to move the dead to public morgues.

Healthcare workers and emergency responders have been faced with soaring demand for their services from the public and officials have appealed to those with mild symptoms to stay home instead of using up precious government resources.

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HEADLINE	03/03 WHO: gaps mental health care persist
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/03/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#covid-cases-continue-to-decline-around-the-world-but-the-who-says-gaps-in-mental-health-care-persist
GIST	<p>The global outlook for the pandemic continues to brighten, with the spread of the once-surging virus steadily declining, from the United States to the Philippines. New cases fell by 16 percent last week, according to new data from the World Health Organization released on Tuesday.</p> <p>Deaths dropped by 10 percent, in a continuation of the downward trends reported by the agency the previous week.</p> <p>As of Tuesday, the daily average number of cases was about 1.5 million, a 27 percent decrease from two weeks ago, according to the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University.</p> <p>Not all countries saw improvement. The W.H.O.'s Western Pacific region reported a 32 percent increase in new weekly cases. Despite high vaccination rates in China and Vietnam, new cases have multiplied rapidly over the past two weeks. And in South Korea, cases have climbed to their highest levels.</p> <p>Vaccine coverage around the world has been rising. Vaccine supply and delivery constraints have improved, W.H.O. officials said at a Wednesday news conference, adding that 56 percent of the global population is now fully vaccinated. More than 10 billion doses of the vaccine have been administered, according to Our World in Data.</p> <p>Leaders of countries and municipalities have interpreted the decline in cases and deaths as a signal that life could return to normal in the near future. In recent weeks, pandemic restrictions such as mask mandates governing public spaces and schools have fallen away in many communities.</p> <p>But the toll on mental health has been steep and gaps in care persist, the W.H.O. said in a report on Wednesday. The agency found that in the pandemic's first year, depression and anxiety had increased</p>

	<p>by 25 percent. The data represented “just the tip of the iceberg,” said Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the W.H.O.’s director general.</p> <p>“This is a wake-up call to all countries to pay more attention to mental health and do a better job of supporting their populations’ mental health,” he added.</p> <p>The report named a long list of stressors aggravating mental health issues, including social isolation, loneliness, fear of infection, financial duress, the suffering and death of loved ones and grief after bereavement. While people with pre-existing mental health disorders were not predisposed to contracting the virus, they were more likely to be hospitalized, become severely ill and die if infected, the data suggested.</p> <p>The pandemic has also disproportionately affected the mental health of young people and women, the report said.</p> <p>And pregnant women have been particularly vulnerable, according to W.H.O. officials. Over the past two years, more than 365,000 coronavirus cases have been reported among pregnant women in the Americas, according to data from the Pan American Health Organization, a division of the W.H.O. More than 3,000 of them died.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 New Zealand battles major outbreak
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/03/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#new-zealand-battered-by-omicron-is-dealing-with-its-first-major-surge
GIST	<p>For much of the past two years, Covid-19 was a phantom presence in New Zealand, a plague experienced mostly through news reports from faraway lands.</p> <p>Now, suddenly, it has become a highly personal threat.</p> <p>New Zealand is being walloped by a major outbreak of the Omicron variant, with the virus spreading at what may be the fastest rate in the world. On Thursday, the country reported 23,194 new cases, a once unthinkable number in a small island nation of about five million people where the record daily case count before the current wave was in the low hundreds.</p> <p>The explosion in cases has come as the government, under political pressure, loosened its strict regulations meant to prevent the spread of the virus, and as the highly transmissible Omicron reduced the effectiveness of the controls that remained.</p> <p>That has filled many New Zealanders with anxiety as they learn to live with the pandemic-related risk that the rest of the world has grappled with since early 2020.</p> <p>“For the vast majority of the pandemic, most New Zealanders didn’t know anyone who had Covid-19. That’s changing massively now,” said Siouxsie Wiles, a microbiologist at the University of Auckland. “This is the first time most New Zealanders are dealing with Covid-19 in their own homes.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Russia isolation on Earth moves into space
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/science/russia-oneweb-launch.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=Science
GIST	<p>OneWeb, a satellite internet company partly owned by the British government, has canceled an upcoming satellite launch using a Russian rocket and suspended all future launches that relied on Russia, the company announced on Thursday after a tense public standoff with Roscosmos, Russia’s space agency.</p> <p>Also on Thursday, Roscosmos announced it would stop selling rocket engines to American companies.</p>

The moves, both fallout from Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, stand to further isolate the Russian space agency from its Western space partners, and limit Russia's private space activities dramatically. OneWeb's loss of a reliable rocket provider for launches also poses novel challenges for the company as it had aimed to complete its constellation of 648 satellites in orbit later this year.

OneWeb was rescued from bankruptcy in 2020 by the British government and other investors. It was scheduled to launch 36 satellites aboard a Russian Soyuz rocket from Kazakhstan on Friday. The company has sent roughly 400 satellites to orbit since 2019, every time using Soyuz, a workhorse rocket that's been active since the days of the Cold War space race.

But on Wednesday, just after the Soyuz rolled out to the pad ahead of its launch, Dmitry Rogozin, Russia's space chief, announced two conditions aimed at countering the sanctions placed on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine: The space agency would not proceed with the satellite mission unless Britain withdrew its multibillion dollar stake in OneWeb and the company provided a "guarantee that its satellites will not be used for military purposes."

Mr. Rogozin also posted a video on Twitter showing Roscosmos personnel on a platform next to the rocket covering up British, American and Japanese flags emblazoned on the rocket's exterior. "The launchers at Baikonur decided that without the flags of some countries, our rocket would look more beautiful," said Mr. Rogozin, a former deputy prime minister who often makes bombastic remarks on social media.

The space agency's ultimatum, which came just three days before the previously planned launch, spurred emergency discussions among British officials and OneWeb shareholders, who decided Wednesday night to cease all future launches from Baikonur, the spaceport in Kazakhstan where Russia conducts most of its launches. Mr. Rogozin suggested on Twitter that OneWeb's decision would plunge the company into another bankruptcy proceeding.

Chris McLaughlin, OneWeb's chief of government affairs, dismissed the warning.

"This is an incredibly well-funded company with no debt, backed by powerful international shareholders who made the decision themselves," he said in an interview.

Britain does not possess its own ability to launch large payloads to orbit. Mr. McLaughlin said OneWeb would look to alternative launch providers in Japan, India and the United States.

"We always keep an eye on the launcher environment, but this is a totally new and unprecedented thing," Mr. McLaughlin said.

The company was rescued from bankruptcy in 2020 by India's Bharti Enterprises, OneWeb's largest shareholder, and Britain, whose \$500 million public investment in the satellite operator aimed to boost Britain's space economy. Without rockets to launch on, OneWeb's aim to complete its mega-constellation faces serious disruption. It is competing with SpaceX's Starlink constellation to beam broadband internet to remote regions around the world.

OneWeb had already faced pressure from British politicians to follow energy companies in severing Russian business ties. The company had paid for its Russian launches in bulk through Arianespace, the French rocket company, and had six more missions remaining under the contract — a launch lineup likely worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

In the coming days, OneWeb is set to enter negotiations with Arianespace to determine how, if possible, to retrieve the money for the suspended Soyuz missions, according to a OneWeb official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive business deliberations he was not authorized to disclose. The official added it was unclear to OneWeb executives when or how the 36 satellites currently in Russia for

Friday's now-canceled mission would come off the rocket, or where those satellites will be stored while OneWeb searches for a different launch provider.

"There is no quick fix to this problem," said Caleb Henry, a satellite industry analyst at Quilty Analytics. "They have the money to find new launches, it's just the huge inconvenience of doing so."

Mr. Henry added that launch contracts of this size are typically signed two years in advance.

"OneWeb had anticipated finishing their constellation by August, so that is not going to be possible with a new launch provider," he said.

Russia's move to hobble the business of one of its space agency's biggest commercial clients was perhaps the strongest example so far of how the war in Ukraine was spilling over into space, an area where the country has for decades found cooperation with countries that were once its Cold War adversaries.

Last week, Roscosmos withdrew more than 80 Russian personnel from French Guiana where the European Space Agency has its only launch site and flies commercial Soyuz missions. Then ESA said a joint robotic mission to Mars by the agency and Russia, expected to launch later this year, is now "very unlikely" to proceed on time. And on Thursday, Roscosmos said it would stop cooperating with Germany on joint space station research projects.

With the barrage of Western sanctions over the invasion, Roscosmos's isolation from its Western partners seemed inevitable, said Victoria Samson, a space policy analyst at the Secure World Foundation.

"It's not encouraging that Russia's space agency is self-isolating," she said. "Maybe this is Russia expediting the death of connections that might be happening in due time anyways. But now it's being done on their terms."

NASA, which jointly manages the International Space Station with Roscosmos, has said it intends to continue cooperating with its Russian counterparts. The two partners had been negotiating an agreement to launch Russian astronauts on Crew Dragon, a SpaceX vehicle that carries NASA astronauts.

Beyond cooperation with NASA, Russia said on Thursday it would halt the sale of rocket engines to American companies.

"In a situation like this, we can't supply the United States with our world's best rocket engines," Mr. Rogozin said on Russian state television. "Let them fly on something else, their broomsticks, I don't know what."

The freeze may most acutely affect Northrop Grumman, which uses Russian-made engines for its Antares launch vehicle that ferries cargo to the space station for NASA. SpaceX also provides this service to the space station, as do spacecraft launched by Japan and Russia.

In a more symbolic move, Mr. Rogozin said Russia would no longer provide assistance in the use of a different Russian engine already purchased and in use by United Launch Alliance for Atlas 5, one of the most frequently used American rockets.

U.L.A.'s chief executive, Tory Bruno, played down the effect of the loss of technical aid from Russia, saying, "We can do without if necessary."

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HEADLINE	03/03 Seattle cleared homeless camp relocates
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/mercero-street-camp-cleared-but-some-of-its-tents-moved-a-block-away
GIST	SEATTLE — Less than 24 hours after a notorious Seattle homeless encampment was cleared, new tents were setup Thursday a block away.

City crews removed the infamous encampment from a field near Mercer and Highway 99 on Wednesday but tents have now appeared across the street.

That has led to frustration for some business owners, who said the city is just moving the problem around instead of solving it.

When the crime and safety problems were across the street from Copiers Northwest, employees there said it was bad enough.

The firm's workers now fear things will get worse with campers moving to their doorstep.

"I'm concerned that things aren't getting better," said Dawn Peschek, who works with Copiers Northwest. "I'm concerned that here we are, years later and there's too much talk, and nothing's happening."

Hours after crews removed the Mercer and Dexter Avenue homeless encampment, some of the tents have already moved to the sidewalk along Highway 99 — right in front of the copiers business.

While at the site, KOMO News saw some of the relocated campers openly doing drugs.

"Everyone says, 'Oh this is a great idea let's move everyone, this is a great idea,' and they just move somewhere else," Peschek said. "Do what you're doing to follow through, help the people."

The encampment on Mercer Street had a history of violent crimes caught on camera, including a machete attack, a deadly hit-and-run, tent fires and robberies.

"We have employees that have been assaulted and harassed," said Chase Hobbs, facility manager. "So that's definitely a concern for us."

Said Peschek: "We have people breaking in the back entrance trying to get into the building."

While the city's Hope Team said 33 people accepted offers for shelter after the camp was clear, another 17 turned down the help.

An outreach worker told KOMO News some of the campers have even barricaded themselves in a nearby vacant building.

"They're barricaded in," said Ross Kidd, who works with Praise A Lujah Ministries. "They grabbed tools and stuff and they are in there right now."

As more tents takeover the sidewalk, they're demanding to know what the end game is.

"I would say what's the plan?" Hobbs said. "Definitely not a solution to the problem at all. No."

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HEADLINE	03/04 Russia troops occupy plant complex
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/world/europe/nuclear-plant-fire-zaporizhzhia-video.html
GIST	<p>A fire broke out early Friday at a complex in southern Ukraine housing Europe's largest nuclear power plant after Russian troops fired on the area, and the Russian military later took control of the site, Ukrainian officials said.</p> <p>Security camera footage verified by The New York Times showed a building ablaze inside the Zaporizhzhia nuclear complex near a line of military vehicles. The videos appeared to show people in the vehicles firing at buildings in the power plant. Ukraine's state emergency service later said the blaze went out after 6 a.m.</p>

The fire did not affect essential equipment at the plant, the International Atomic Energy Agency [said on Twitter](#), citing its communication with the Ukrainian government.

About an hour after dawn, Ukraine's nuclear regulatory inspectorate [said in a statement](#) that Russian military forces were now occupying the complex. It said that all of the site's power units remained intact and that no changes in radiation levels had been observed.

The fire broke out after a Russian attack on a training building outside the perimeter of the plant, according to a statement by Ukraine's state emergency service. A spokesman for the nuclear plant, Andriy Tuz, was quoted by The Associated Press as telling Ukrainian television that shells had set fire to one of the plant's six reactors that was under renovation and not operating.

Ukraine's nuclear inspectorate later said in its statement that one unit of the six units was operating, another was in "outage," two were being cooled down, and two others had been disconnected from the grid.

President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine had accused the Russian military of deliberately attacking the complex and said an explosion there would have been "the end for everybody, the end of Europe." "Only immediate actions by Europe could stop the Russian army," he added.

President Biden spoke with Mr. Zelensky about the fire and joined him in urging Russia to "cease its military activities in the area and allow firefighters and emergency responders to access the site," the White House said. Local reports later said that emergency crews had gained access.

Mr. Biden's energy secretary, Jennifer M. Granholm, [said on Twitter](#) that the United States had not detected elevated radiation readings in the area, echoing an earlier assessment by the International Atomic Energy Agency. "The plant's reactors are protected by robust containment structures and reactors are being safely shut down," she said.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain said he would seek an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council about the blaze at the complex, according to his office.

Before the fire was reported by Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, the director general for the International Atomic Energy Agency [said in a statement](#) that "a large number of Russian tanks and infantry" had entered Enerhodar, a town next to the plant. The director general, Rafael Mariano Grossi, said that troops were "moving directly" toward the reactor site.

The [Zaporizhzhia](#) nuclear complex, on the Dnieper River roughly a hundred miles north of Crimea, is the largest in Europe. [According to the International Atomic Energy Agency](#), its six reactors produce a total of 6,000 megawatts of electric power.

In comparison, the Chernobyl plant in northern Ukraine produced 3,800 megawatts — about a third less. (A megawatt, one million watts, is enough power to light 10,000 hundred-watt bulbs.) The four reactors of the Chernobyl complex were shut down after one suffered a catastrophic fire and meltdown in 1986.

The reactors' cores are full of highly radioactive fuel. But an additional danger at the Zaporizhzhia site is the many acres of open pools of water behind the complex where spent fuel rods have been cooled for years. [Experts fear](#) that errant shells or missiles that hit such sites could set off radiological disasters.

For days, [social media reports](#) have detailed how the residents of Enerhodar set up a giant barrier of tires, vehicles and metal barricades to try to block a Russian advance into the city and the reactor site. Christoph Koettl, a visual investigator for The New York Times, [noted on Twitter](#) that the barricades were so large that they could be [seen from outer space by orbiting satellites](#).

	Starting this past Sunday, three days into the invasion, Ukraine's nuclear regulator began reporting an unusual rate of disconnection: Six of the nation's 15 reactors were offline. On Tuesday, the Zaporizhzhia facility was the site with the most reactors offline.
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HEADLINE	03/03 Last vestiges of Russia's free press fall
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/world/europe/russia-ukraine-propaganda-censorship.html
GIST	<p>As President Vladimir V. Putin wages war against Ukraine, he is fighting a parallel battle on the home front, dismantling the last vestiges of a Russian free press.</p> <p>On Thursday, the pillars of Russia's independent broadcast media collapsed under pressure from the state. Echo of Moscow, the freewheeling radio station founded by Soviet dissidents in 1990 and that symbolized Russia's new freedoms, was "liquidated" by its board. TV Rain, the youthful independent television station that calls itself "the optimistic channel" said it would suspend operations indefinitely.</p> <p>And Dmitri A. Muratov, the journalist who shared the Nobel Peace Prize last year, said that his newspaper Novaya Gazeta, which survived the murders of six of its journalists, could be on the verge of shutting down as well.</p> <p>"Everything that's not propaganda is being eliminated," Mr. Muratov said.</p> <p>Precipitating the outlets' demise were plans by the Russian Parliament to take up legislation on Friday that would make news considered "fakes" about Russia's war in Ukraine punishable by yearslong prison terms. The Russian authorities have already made it clear that the very act of calling it a "war" — the Kremlin prefers the term "special military operation" — is considered disinformation.</p> <p>"We're going to punish those who spread panic using fakes by up to 15 years," a senior lawmaker, Sholban Kara-ool, said on Thursday. During World War II, he said, such people "were shot on the spot."</p> <p>The crackdown on independent journalists — many of whom fled the country this week, fearing that even worse repressions were to come — added to the sense of crisis in Russia. The economy continued to reel from Western sanctions as airlines canceled more international flights and more companies suspended operations — including Ikea, the Swedish furniture retailer, a totem for Russia's middle class and the employer of some 15,000 Russians.</p> <p>Mr. Putin appeared unbowed by the crisis and the Western furor. He told President Emmanuel Macron of France in a phone call that his aim of securing "the demilitarization and neutral status of Ukraine" would be "achieved no matter what," according to the Kremlin. A second round of peace talks in Belarus yielded no breakthrough, though Ukraine said Russia had agreed to "humanitarian corridors" to allow civilians to leave areas of intense fighting.</p> <p>"Unfortunately, the results Ukraine needs are not yet achieved," said Mikhaïlo Podolyak, one of the Ukrainian representatives.</p> <p>Thursday evening, in nationally televised remarks, Mr. Putin for the first time personally acknowledged Russian casualties in the fighting and praised Russian troops as heroes who were fighting "fascists" akin to Hitler's invading army.</p> <p>Ukrainian resistance, Mr. Putin said, was only evidence of the population being brainwashed by Western propaganda and by neo-Nazis.</p> <p>"I will never give up my conviction that Russians and Ukrainians are one people," he said. "That's even despite the fact that some of the inhabitants of Ukraine have been intimidated, and many have been fooled by neo-Nazi, nationalist propaganda."</p>

Many Russians, however, have not bought into the narrative. Lukoil, Russia's second-biggest oil producer, on Thursday became the biggest Russian company to publicly distance itself from the war, publishing a statement from its board of directors calling for its "soonest cessation."

And up to now, Russian independent media led by Echo of Moscow, TV Rain and Novaya Gazeta had given those Russians a voice.

"There's a very broad antiwar mood in Russia — I'd say it's genetic," Aleksei A. Venediktov, Echo of Moscow's longtime editor in chief, said in an interview on Thursday, referring to the lingering scars of World War II. "War is not victory. War is horror, it is tragedy, it is loss in every family."

As a result, Mr. Venediktov argues, the Kremlin is intent on controlling the narrative of its "special military operation" in Ukraine even more intensely than it otherwise controls the news media.

Echo of Moscow is owned by Gazprom, the state energy giant, but has often broadcast sharp critiques of the Kremlin. Analysts believed the station survived thanks to Mr. Venediktov's personal connections to the ruling elite and Mr. Putin's desire to maintain a veneer of pluralism amid his creeping authoritarianism. For instance, it gave voice to supporters of the imprisoned opposition leader Aleksei A. Navalny and covered the wave of protests he inspired across Russia early last year.

During the war in Ukraine, Echo of Moscow has featured interviews with Ukrainian journalists who described the horrors of Russia's invasion, a decision that appeared to cross a line. On Tuesday, the authorities took Echo of Moscow off the air for the first time since the Soviet coup attempt in 1991 and on Thursday, its board of directors decided to shut the station entirely.

"We came under the steamroller of military censorship," Mr. Venediktov said.

TV Rain was founded in 2010 by a media entrepreneur, Natalia Sindeyeva, and a TV director, Vera Krichevskaya. It became a symbol of free-minded journalism, and a place where young journalists could launch their careers.

Though the Kremlin created challenges for the channel, it always found a way to persevere. In 2014, cable networks removed TV Rain from their bundles, costing the channel about 80 percent of its audience. It then pivoted to a subscription model.

On Thursday, TV Rain broadcast a full news report on YouTube, after which Ms. Sindeyeva announced that the outlet was shutting down, at least for the time being.

"We need time to exhale and think about how to continue," Ms. Sindeyeva said. Roskomnadzor, the Russian telecommunications regulator, blocked the outlet on Tuesday, accusing it of inciting extremism, abusing Russian citizens, causing mass disruption of public calm and safety, and encouraging protests.

"I don't want to cry because we've lived through so much in this life, we've dealt with so many difficulties and we never gave up," said Ms. Sindeyeva. "We very much hope that we will be back on some platform because our work is so important to our audience."

After TV Rain's final broadcast, various employees — some of them having just fled the country — appeared on a livestream on the company's YouTube channel. They gathered in the studio with Ms. Sindeyeva and over Zoom as more than 110,000 viewers tuned in. In speeches that turned emotional and tearful, they talked about their work, the state of the Russian news media and the channel's accomplishments, and offered words of fortification for everyone watching.

Tikhon Dzyadko, the editor in chief of TV Rain, confirmed on Wednesday that he had left Russia out of concerns for his safety. "We have to be accountable to ourselves that we're on the right side of history," Mr. Dzyadko said.

At the end of the livestream, those who Zoomed in left, and everyone else walked out of the studio. “No to war,” Ms. Sindeyeva said as the lights went off.

For a few seconds, Tchaikovsky’s “Swan Lake” appeared. During the 1991 attempt to overthrow the Soviet Premier Mikhail S. Gorbachev, Soviet state television played “Swan Lake” on a loop.

It did the same as the country waited for the party leadership to select successors to Soviet premiers Leonid Brezhnev, Konstantin Chernenko and Yuri Andropov. It was a not so subtle hint: Even Mr. Putin is not forever.

Mr. Muratov, of Novaya Gazeta, said he understood Ms. Sindeyeva’s decision, and that she “is making the responsible decision in terms of protecting her journalists’ safety.”

Like his colleagues, Mr. Muratov has felt the pressure of the government closing in. In the last several days, he said the newspaper he runs, Novaya Gazeta, had received fines totaling 1,300,000 rubles, or about \$12,000.

At Echo of Moscow’s offices on Thursday, Mr. Venediktov said that in a “regular country,” Echo of Moscow would be considered banal. “We’ve held on to old-fashioned, traditional journalism where all points of view must be shared and where forbidden topics can be discussed, political and not,” Mr. Venediktov said.

But Echo of Moscow refused to stick to official themes of triumph and progress, instead digging into the problems and the culprits. Ukrainian experts and politicians were invited to speak on air.

“Since everybody from the president to the leaders of the opposition listens to us, we are influential,” Mr. Venediktov said. “The authorities see a threat in us.”

A sticking point has been what to call the war in Ukraine.

“They want to give the population the impression that this is a short, effective, operation without a lot of victims,” said Andrei Kolesnikov, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Moscow Center think tank. “The regime gives a lot of attention to words, or to the lack of words.” He drew the example of Mr. Navalny, an opposition figure in Russia whom Mr. Putin does not refer to by name.

“This isn’t a question of media, this is about freedom of speech in the public sphere,” Mr. Venediktov said. “You can’t speak for or against something. That’s a crime.”

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HEADLINE	03/03 Ukraine military resisted Russia so far
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/us/politics/russia-ukraine-military.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Ukraine’s soldiers have blown up bridges to halt advancing Russian ground troops. Its pilots and air defenses have prevented Russian fighter jets from conquering the skies. And a band of savvy Ukrainian cyberwarriors are so far beating Moscow in an information war, inspiring support at home and abroad.</p> <p>To the surprise of many military analysts, Ukrainian troops are mounting a stiffer-than-expected resistance to Russian forces up and down battle lines across a country the size of Texas, fighting with a resourcefulness and creativity that U.S. analysts said could trip up Russian troops for weeks or months to come.</p> <p>The Ukrainians are also exploiting a bungled beginning to Russia’s all-out assault. Armed with shoulder-fired anti-tank weapons, they have attacked a mileslong Russian armored convoy bearing down on Kyiv, the capital, helping stall an advance plagued by fuel and food shortages, and stretching a march that was expected to take a handful of days into possibly weeks.</p>

To be sure, Russia's invasion is only a week old. The strategic southern city of Kherson fell on Wednesday; the Kremlin's army has intensified its bombardment of Kyiv and other cities; and, despite a flow of fresh arms pouring in from the West, Ukrainian leaders say they desperately need more weapons to destroy Russian tanks and down Russian warplanes.

And while the Ukrainian government has publicized its victories and Russian attacks that killed civilians, it has said far less about battlefield losses of its mechanized units. For their part, Russian officials are keen not to present the operation as a war, and so they have not put out information about the engagements their forces have won.

The result, in these early days of the invasion, is that the Ukrainians are turning the tables on the Russians in the information campaign.

On the battlefield, the Ukrainian military is conducting a hugely effective and mobile defense, using their knowledge of their home turf to stymie Russian forces on multiple fronts, Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on Thursday.

General Milley said some of the tactics employed by Ukrainian troops included using mobile weapons systems to bedevil the Russians wherever they could. Ukraine's forces, he told reporters traveling with him in Europe, are "fighting with extraordinary skill and courage against Russian forces."

U.S. officials have been impressed with the fighting prowess of the Ukrainians, but their assessment that Russia has the superior military has not changed.

Ukraine has succeeded in slowing the Russian advance, but has not been able to stop it, nor is the resistance strong enough to shift Russian President Vladimir V. Putin's war aims. Over the long term, U.S. officials said, it will be difficult for Ukraine to continue to frustrate the Russian advance.

In the meantime, though, Ukrainians are turning into a nation at arms. "In combat, it's always different than what you thought it'd be, and the side that learns faster and adapts faster will win out," said Frederick B. Hodges, the former top U.S. Army commander in Europe who is now with the Center for European Policy Analysis. "So far, Ukraine is learning and adapting faster."

Ukraine has one of Europe's largest militaries, with 170,000 active-duty troops, 100,000 reservists and territorial defense forces that include at least 100,000 veterans. Thousands of civilians are also now enlisting.

The Ukrainian army has been training for further Russian encroachment ever since Russia seized Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and began supporting separatists in the Donbas region, in eastern Ukraine. Many of Ukraine's veterans fought in those battles, so there is a subset of the population that is trained and knows how to fight Russians.

U.S. Special Operations Forces have also trained Ukrainian military forces. Leaders in Kyiv then assigned those soldiers to conventional units, allowing them in turn to train a larger portion of the army. American analysts say that training has made a difference on the battlefield.

The United States has provided more than \$3 billion in weapons, equipment and other supplies to Ukraine's armed forces since 2014. In those eight years, U.S. military advisers, including Army Green Berets and National Guard troops, have trained more than 27,000 Ukrainian soldiers at the Yavoriv Combat Training Center near Lviv in western Ukraine.

In Brussels on Thursday, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the Ukrainian military was "performing better and putting up more resistance than most experts expected, and surely more than Russia expected."

“They’re there to defend their own land,” Mr. Stoltenberg told reporters traveling with General Milley.

Indeed, Michael R. Carpenter, the U.S. representative to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, hailed a Ukrainian marine, Vitaliy Skakun, in remarks in Vienna on Thursday. The marine had blown himself up on a bridge in the southern Kherson region to prevent a line of Russian tanks from crossing, the Ukrainian military said.

From the invasion’s opening hours, Ukraine’s underdog military has sought to flip the script on the more than 150,000 Russian forces massed on its borders. For instance, Ukrainian troops repelled an attack by Russian airborne and special forces on a key airfield north of Kyiv last Thursday in the initial hours of the war, thwarting a Russian attempt to open a major air bridge on the outskirts of the capital.

“In city defense and skirmishing on the outskirts of cities, Ukrainian forces are doing quite well,” said Michael Kofman, director of Russia studies at CNA, a defense research institute. “The shambolic nature of the Russian war effort undoubtedly helps.”

As Russians approached Kyiv and Kharkiv, the Ukrainians were able to shift their forces to critical locations faster than the invading forces. Not only have the Ukrainians moved more nimbly, they also made good choices about where to concentrate firepower.

“The art of mechanized maneuver warfare is being able to concentrate overwhelming combat power at decisive sections of the front, places of your choosing,” said Frederick W. Kagan, a military strategist who has advised the U.S. command in both Iraq and Afghanistan. “The Russians, astonishingly, failed to do that. But the Ukrainians have taken advantage of their ability to move reinforcements rapidly and counterattack.”

Thomas Bullock, an open-source analyst from Janes, the defense intelligence firm, said Russian forces have made tactical errors that the Ukrainians have been able to capitalize on.

“It looks like the Ukrainians have been most successful when ambushing Russian troops,” Mr. Bullock said. The Russians “have stuck to main roads so that they can move quickly and not risk getting bogged down in mud. But they are advancing on winding roads and their flanks and supply routes are overly exposed to Ukrainian attacks. And that is where they have had their most success.”

In Kyiv, the Ukrainian counterattack has pushed the Russian troops west and forced them to call in reinforcements as they try to encircle the city, said Mr. Kagan, an expert on the Russian military who leads the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute.

While it is often easier to defend than attack, especially in a complex multifront invasion, the Ukrainians have taken advantage of the Russian decision to use too small a force, sometimes only two battalions at a time, to take key points.

“They have been much more evenly matched at the tactical level than they should have been, had the Russians conducted the operations well,” Mr. Kagan said. “The Ukrainians have just been much smarter about this than the Russians.”

The Ukrainians have been far more successful in the north, defending Kyiv and Kharkiv, the country’s second-largest city, than they have been in the south, where better trained Russian forces in Crimea have had more success.

“In the south, on the Crimean front, when the Ukrainians are engaged in mechanized combat they are losing,” Mr. Bullock said.

U.S. government officials believe that Mr. Putin is likely to redouble his assault. But some analysts say that growing Russian casualties, increasing economic disruptions in Russia resulting from sanctions, and the likelihood of an enduring Ukrainian insurgency could upend that strategy.

HEADLINE	03/03 New US worry: dangers cornering Putin
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/us/politics/biden-putin-sanctions.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Senior White House officials designing the strategy to confront Russia have begun quietly debating a new concern: that the avalanche of sanctions directed at Moscow, which have gained speed faster than they imagined, is cornering President Vladimir V. Putin and may prompt him to lash out, perhaps expanding the conflict beyond Ukraine.</p> <p>In Situation Room meetings in recent days, the issue has come up repeatedly, according to three officials. Mr. Putin’s tendency, American intelligence officials have told the White House and Congress, is to double down when he feels trapped by his own overreach. So they have described a series of possible reactions, ranging from indiscriminate shelling of Ukrainian cities to compensate for the early mistakes made by his invading force, to cyberattacks directed at the American financial system, to more nuclear threats and perhaps moves to take the war beyond Ukraine’s borders.</p> <p>The debate over Mr. Putin’s next moves is linked to an urgent re-examination by intelligence agencies of the Russian leader’s mental state, and whether his ambitions and appetite for risk have been altered by two years of Covid isolation.</p> <p>Those concerns accelerated after Mr. Putin’s order on Sunday to place the country’s strategic nuclear weapons on a “combat ready” alert to respond to the West’s “aggressive comments.” (In the ensuing days, however, national security officials say they have seen little evidence on the ground that Russia’s nuclear forces have actually moved to a different state of readiness.)</p> <p>It was a sign of the depth of American concern that Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III announced Wednesday that he was canceling a previously scheduled Minuteman nuclear missile test, to avoid escalating direct challenges to Moscow or giving Mr. Putin an excuse to once again invoke the power of the country’s nuclear arsenal.</p> <p>“We did not take this decision lightly, but instead, to demonstrate that we are a responsible nuclear power,” John F. Kirby, the Pentagon press secretary, said Wednesday. “We recognize at this moment of tension how critical it is that both the United States and Russia bear in mind the risk of miscalculation, and take steps to reduce those risks.”</p> <p>Nonetheless, Mr. Putin’s reaction to the initial wave of sanctions has provoked a range of concerns that one senior official called the “Cornered Putin Problem.” Those concerns center on a series of recent announcements: the pullout of oil companies like Exxon and Shell from developing Russia’s oil fields, the moves against Russia’s central bank that sent the ruble plunging, and Germany’s surprise announcement that it would drop its ban on sending lethal weapons to the Ukrainian forces and ramp up its defense spending.</p> <p>But beyond canceling the missile test, there is no evidence that the United States is considering steps to reduce tensions, and a senior official said there was no interest in backing off sanctions.</p> <p>“Quite the contrary,” said the official, who, like other American officials interviewed for this story, asked for anonymity to discuss the internal debates among Mr. Biden’s advisers.</p> <p>In fact, President Biden announced expanded sanctions on Thursday, aimed at Russia’s oligarch class. Many of those named — including Dmitri S. Peskov, Mr. Putin’s spokesman and one of his close advisers — rank among his most influential defenders and the beneficiaries of the system he has created.</p> <p>Mr. Biden, reading a prepared statement and taking no questions, said the sanctions have had “a profound impact already.”</p>

A few hours after he spoke, S&P dropped Russia's credit rating to CCC-, the credit-rating agency said in a statement. That is far below the junk bond levels Russia was ranked at a few days after the invasion, and just two notches above a warning that the country was going into default.

It suggested that Mr. Putin's effort to "sanctions-proof" his economy had largely failed. And at least for now, there is no discernible off-ramp for the Russian leader short of declaring a cease-fire or pulling back his forces — steps he has so far shown no interest in taking.

At a news briefing at the White House on Thursday afternoon, Jen Psaki, the press secretary, said that she knew of no efforts to show Mr. Putin a way out. "I think right in this moment, they are marching toward Kyiv with a convoy and continuing to take reportedly barbaric steps against the people of Ukraine. So now is not the moment where we are offering options for reducing sanctions."

Yet a senior State Department official, asked about the debates inside the administration on the risks ahead, said there were nuances in the administration's approach that point to possible outs for the Russian leader.

Mr. Biden's policy, the official said, was not one of seeking regime change in Russia. The idea, he said, was to influence Mr. Putin's actions, not his grip on power. And the sanctions, the official noted, were designed not as a punishment, but as leverage to end the war. They will escalate if Mr. Putin escalates, the official said. But the administration would calibrate its sanctions, and perhaps reduce them, if Mr. Putin begins to de-escalate.

And the official said that because Mr. Putin has now exerted such control over Russian media, closing down the last vestiges of independent news organizations, he could spin some kind of de-escalation into a victory.

Yet that hope collides with the assessments of Mr. Putin's instincts, many of which are based on open, unclassified observations.

William J. Burns, the C.I.A. director, was an early advocate of the view that the Russian leader planned to invade, and was not massing troops around Ukraine simply to gain leverage in some kind of bargaining game.

"I would never underestimate President Putin's risk appetite on Ukraine," Mr. Burns, a former American ambassador to Moscow, who has dealt with Mr. Putin for more than two decades, said in December.

Mr. Putin's views on Ukraine are fiercely held. He seems unlikely to accept any result that does not achieve his goal of bringing Ukraine closer to the Russian fold. And, especially after the Russian military's poor performance in the first week of the war, he may be concerned that any whiff of failure could weaken his hold on power.

His strategy in coming weeks, some other American officials have warned in closed meetings since the crisis accelerated, could be to redirect the conflict toward Washington, hoping to distract from the Russian forces' attacks on civilians in Ukraine and rouse a nationalistic response to the actions of a longtime adversary.

If Mr. Putin wants to strike at the American financial system, as Mr. Biden has struck at his, he has only one significant pathway in: his well-trained army of hackers, and an adjacent group of criminal ransomware operators, some of whom have publicly pledged to help him in his battle.

Tatyana Bolton, the policy director for cybersecurity and emerging threats at the R Street Institute, expressed confidence on Thursday that the financial industry was ready.

“The J.P. Morgans of the world spend more on cybersecurity than many government agencies,” said Ms. Bolton, a former senior official in the Department of Homeland Security whose family immigrated from Russia.

But she was concerned about the possibility that Mr. Putin would finally activate “pre-positioned malware in the energy sector, as a means of getting back at the United States.”

Members of Congress have also raised concerns that Mr. Putin could unleash Moscow’s network of criminal hackers, who have conducted ransomware attacks that have shut down hospitals, meat processing plants and the Colonial Pipeline network that carried nearly half of the gasoline, diesel and jet fuel on the East Coast.

“If the situation escalates further, I think we are going to see Russian cyberattacks against our critical infrastructure,” said Representative Mike Gallagher, Republican of Wisconsin, a member of the House Intelligence Committee who served as co-chairman of an influential cyberspace commission.

Another possibility is that Mr. Putin will threaten to push further into Moldova or Georgia, which, like Ukraine, are not members of NATO — and thus territory that the American and NATO forces would not enter. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken is making Moldova one of his stops on a reassurance tour that began on Thursday.

There are larger worries, involving potential nuclear threats. Last Sunday, as the fighting accelerated, Belarus passed a referendum that amended its constitution to allow for nuclear weapons to be based, once again, on its territory. American officials are expecting that President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko may well ask Mr. Putin to place tactical weapons in his country, where they would be closer to European capitals. And Mr. Putin has shown, twice this week, that he is ready to remind the world of the powers of his arsenal.

But the next move for Mr. Putin is likely to further intensify his operations in Ukraine, which would almost certainly result in more civilian casualties and destruction.

“It wasn’t a cakewalk for Putin and now he has no choice but to double down,” said Beth Sanner, a former top intelligence official. “This is what autocrats do. You cannot walk away or you look weak.”

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HEADLINE	03/03 Lukoil, Russia oil firm, calls for end to war
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/business/energy-environment/lukoil-russia-oil-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>Lukoil, Russia’s second-largest oil company, appeared to distance itself from President Vladimir V. Putin on Thursday by calling for a “fast resolution” to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>The statement most likely reflects the company’s desire to protect its extensive overseas operations, which include a network of more than 200 franchised gas stations in states like New York and New Jersey. Lukoil is one of the most recognizable Russian brands in the United States.</p> <p>Many lawmakers in Washington are pressing the Biden administration to ban the purchase of Russian oil by U.S. companies and to impose sanctions on Russian energy companies. Shares of Lukoil on the London Stock Exchange have fallen more than 40 percent since mid-February.</p> <p>Lukoil has long projected a more independent image than Rosneft, the state-controlled company that dominates the Russian oil industry. Lukoil was founded in 1991 as a state-owned enterprise as the Soviet Union was falling apart. The company went private in 1993, and seven years later it acquired Getty Oil, an American company, which gave Lukoil a network of U.S. filling stations.</p> <p>“We stand for the immediate cessation of the armed conflict and duly support its resolution through the negotiation process and through diplomatic means,” Lukoil said in a letter to shareholders on Thursday.</p>

It was not clear whether the move was a sign that executives of Russia's largest private enterprise were breaking with Mr. Putin, or mainly an effort to persuade Western leaders, business partners and customers to keep doing business with the company.

"It says they realize it's going to be difficult for them to engage in international commerce, let alone retail sales in the U.S.," said Tom Kloza, global head of energy analysis at the Oil Price Information Service. "I'd call a Russian brand for gasoline the 21st-century equivalent of the scarlet letter."

While petroleum products are the biggest Russian import in the United States and Europe, Russian products and sports teams have become pariahs. Several states have banned the [sale of Russian vodka](#), and restaurants, stores and bars across the United States have taken Russian spirits off their shelves.

The Newark City Council voted on Wednesday to suspend the business licenses of local Lukoil gas stations.

Lukoil stations in the United States sell fuel produced in many countries, including the United States. They are operated as independent franchises, and make up a small fraction of Lukoil's operations. The company has subsidiaries in roughly 30 countries, including those involved in exploring and producing oil and gas in Azerbaijan, Egypt, Colombia and Iraq. The company's biggest reserves are in Russia, particularly western Siberia.

In its letter to shareholders, Lukoil said it "makes every effort to continue stable operations in all countries and regions of its presence, fulfilling the main mission — to provide reliable energy supplies to consumers around the world."

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HEADLINE	03/03 Russia finds friends in Africa
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/world/africa/russia-ukraine-eritrea-africa.html
GIST	<p>NAIROBI, Kenya — Since the days of Nelson Mandela, South Africa's leaders have rejected American criticism of their friendships with autocrats like Fidel Castro of Cuba and Muammar al-Qaddafi of Libya, whose countries backed them during the most desperate moments of the anti-apartheid struggle.</p> <p>Now South Africans are defending their loyalty to another autocrat — Vladimir V. Putin — and sitting out the global outcry over his invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>At the United Nations on Wednesday, South Africa was among 24 African countries that declined to join the resounding vote denouncing Russian aggression: 16 African countries abstained, seven didn't vote at all and one — Eritrea — voted against it, keeping company only with Russia, Belarus, Syria and North Korea.</p> <p>The striking tally reflected the ambiguous attitude across much of the continent where, with a handful of exceptions, the Ukraine war has been greeted with conspicuous silence — a sharp contrast with Western countries that are expanding sanctions, seizing oligarchs' yachts, pressing for war crimes investigations, and even openly threatening to collapse the Russian economy.</p> <p>"Russia is our friend through and through," Lindiwe Zulu, South Africa's minister of social development, who studied in Moscow during the apartheid years, said in an interview. "We are not about to denounce that relationship that we have always had."</p> <p>Many African countries have a longstanding affinity with Russia stretching back to the Cold War: some political and military leaders studied there, and trade links have grown. And in recent years a growing number of countries have contracted with Russian mercenaries and bought ever-greater quantities of Russian weapons.</p>

A few African countries have condemned Russian aggression as an attack on the international order, notably [Kenya](#) and Ghana. Some 25 African nations voted for the U.N. resolution that denounced Mr. Putin's actions on Wednesday. But deep divisions in the continent's response were apparent from the start.

The deputy leader of Sudan flew into Moscow on the first day of the conflict, exchanging warm handshakes with Russia's foreign minister as warplanes bombed Ukrainian cities. Morocco, a longtime American ally, offered a [watery statement](#), annoying American officials who nonetheless kept quiet.

In Ethiopia, [Russian flags flew](#) at a ceremony on Wednesday to commemorate a famous 19th century battle against Italian invaders, recalling the involvement of Russian volunteers who sided with Ethiopian fighters.

African sympathies for Ukraine were also diluted by reports of Ukrainian border guards [forcing African students to the back of lines as they attempted to leave the country](#), raising a furor over racism and discrimination. President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria, which has 4,000 students in Ukraine, decried the reports.

Mr. Putin has partly sidestepped opprobrium in Africa by calling in chits that date back to the Cold War, when Moscow backed African liberation movements and presented itself as a bulwark against Western neocolonialism. On Sunday, Russia's foreign ministry paused its focus on Ukraine to remind South Africa, in a Tweet, of its support for the fight against apartheid.

But Mr. Putin has also divided African opinion thanks to his own efforts to expand Russian influence across the continent through an unusual combination of diplomacy, guns and mercenaries.

In an effort to regain some of the influence that Moscow lost in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union, [Mr. Putin hosted a glitzy summit](#) in the southern Russian city of Sochi in 2019 that was attended by 43 African heads of state. A second Russia-Africa summit is [scheduled for this fall](#).

But as Russia's economy strained under Western sanctions imposed following the annexation of the Crimea in 2014, it could not afford the expensive enticements offered by other powers in Africa, like China's cheap loans or Western development aid.

So it has offered no-questions weapons sales and the services of Russian mercenaries, many employed by the Wagner Group, a company linked to Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close ally of Mr. Putin who is known as "Putin's cook."

In recent years, Wagner mercenaries have fought in civil wars in Libya and Mozambique, and are currently guarding the president of the Central African Republic, where they helped repel a rebel assault on the capital last year.

In January, Wagner fighters appeared in Mali, as part of a deal to combat Islamist insurgents that infuriated France, the former colonial power, which last month declared it was pulling its own soldiers out of Mali.

The military junta ruling Mali denies inviting Wagner into the country, but U.S. military officials say as many as 1,000 Russian mercenaries are already operating there.

Russia's influence also stems from weapons sales. [Russia accounts for nearly half of all arms imports into Africa](#), according to Russia's arms export agency and organizations that monitor weapons transfers.

One of Mr. Putin's staunchest defenders in the past week was a powerful figure in Uganda, a major customer for Russian weapons. Lt Gen [Muhoozi Kainerugaba](#), son of Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni, said in [a Tweet](#):

"The majority of mankind (that are non-white) support Russia's stand in Ukraine."

He added, “When the USSR parked nuclear armed missiles in Cuba in 1962, the West was ready to blow up the world over it. Now when NATO does the same they expect Russia to do differently.”

That reference highlighted a jarring contradiction in Mr. Putin’s new embrace of Africa, said Maxim Matusevich, a history professor at Seton Hall University, in New Jersey, who studies Russia’s relationships in Africa.

“During the Cold War, the Soviets were trying to sell socialism to African nations while criticizing Western colonialism and imperialism,” he said. Now, Russia is engaged in a fresh bid for influence in Africa, but driven by right-wing nationalism.

A similar divide [has emerged in Asia](#), where nations with authoritarian leaders or weak ties to the West have embraced Mr. Putin’s war or avoided criticism of Russian military aggression.

For Africans, the war could hit hard in the pocket. Last week the Automobile Association of South Africa predicted that rising fuel prices would reach a record high in the coming weeks. Food is getting more expensive too — Russia and Ukraine are major sources of wheat and fertilizer in Africa — at a time when many African countries are still reeling from the pandemic.

But the war could also have an economic upside for Africa, albeit one that could take years to be felt. As Europe pivots away from Russian gas imports, it could turn to African countries looking to exploit recently-discovered energy reserves.

President Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania, which is seeking a \$30 billion investment to tap a huge gas discovery in the Indian Ocean, [said](#) the invasion of Ukraine could provide an opportunity.

“Whether Africa or Europe or America, we are looking for markets,” she told The Africa Report, an online news outlet.

Elsewhere, though, Mr. Putin is still benefiting from his image as a thorn in the West’s side. Many South Africans remember that the United States supported the apartheid regime until the 1980s. South Africans also took a sour view of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, said Sithembile Mbete, a senior lecturer in political science and international relations at the University of Pretoria.

However, aside from the historical ties with Russia, South Africa is motivated to call for diplomacy rather than fighting because that approach aligns with the country’s stance on international conflicts for the past 30 years, she said.

“That is the lesson they took from South Africa’s own struggle — that actually apartheid ended when the two sides sat down at the table,” Ms. Mbete said. “When it came down to it, the conflict only ended through negotiation and through compromise.”

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HEADLINE	03/03 BBC revives shortwave radio in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/business/media/bbc-shortwave-radio-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>As Russia is trying to cut off the flow of information in Ukraine by attacking its communications infrastructure, the British news outlet BBC is revisiting a broadcasting tactic popularized during World War II: shortwave radio.</p> <p>The BBC said this week that it would use radio frequencies that can travel for long distances and be accessible on portable radios to broadcast its World Service news in English for four hours a day in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, and in parts of Russia.</p>

"It's often said truth is the first casualty of war," Tim Davie, director-general of the BBC, said in a statement. "In a conflict where disinformation and propaganda is rife, there is a clear need for factual and independent news people can trust."

On Tuesday, [Russian projectiles](#) struck the main radio and television tower in Kyiv. Oleksii Reznikov, Ukraine's defense minister, [wrote on Twitter](#) that Russia's goal was "to break the resistance of the Ukrainian people and army," starting with "a breakdown of connection" and "the spread of massive FAKE messages that the Ukrainian country leadership has agreed to give up."

Shortwave radio has been a go-to vehicle to reach listeners in conflict zones for decades, used to deliver crackling dispatches to [soldiers in the Persian Gulf war](#), send codes to [spies in North Korea](#) and pontificate through the Iron Curtain during [the Cold War](#). But more modern forms of radio along with the internet eventually pushed shortwave [out of favor](#); the BBC retired its shortwave transmissions in Europe [14 years ago](#).

Over the last week of February, viewership of BBC's Ukrainian language site more than doubled from a year earlier to 3.9 million visitors, the broadcaster said on Wednesday. The BBC [also provides news coverage](#) in the country via its website, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, Viber and Espresso TV.

Millions of Russians are also turning to the BBC, the broadcaster said. The audience for the BBC's Russian language news website reached a record 10.7 million in the past week, more than tripling its weekly average so far in 2022, the company said. Visitors to BBC's English language website from within Russia surged 252 percent to 423,000.

Within the country, BBC also posts updates on Telegram, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. Other Western news outlets have also experienced a surge in viewership. Visits to The Guardian's digital platforms from Russian and Ukrainian audiences were up 180 percent from January.

The BBC's coverage has led to complaints from Russian officials. Maria Zakharova, the spokeswoman for Russia's Foreign Ministry, said during a briefing broadcast by [RT](#), the [Kremlin-backed Russian media outlet](#), that Russia was the victim of "unprecedented information terrorism" that was "devoted to discrediting Russian actions" and "creating hysteria around Ukrainian events."

The BBC "plays a determined role in undermining the Russian stability and security," Ms. Zakharova said, without providing evidence.

Early Friday, BBC's Russian service reported problems accessing its site in Russia.

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HEADLINE	03/03 Some King Co. businesses still 'vax proof'
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/money/business/king-county-businesses-keep-proof-of-vaccination-in-place/281-3ecea584-57e1-4104-85c3-8d8201c7236a
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — King County officially lifted a mandate requiring restaurants, bars, and some other businesses to check for proof of vaccination before customers enter. However, some local spots say they still plan to require proof for now.</p> <p>The Octopus Bar in Wallingford is one of them.</p> <p>"What I want people at home to know is, this isn't us saying that because you think this way, we don't want you here; ultimately we do want everyone here," General Manager Keeley Gislason said.</p> <p>Gislason said they want everyone to come and feel comfortable, but their priority is health, safety and the comfort level of their staff.</p>

"Obviously we're not scientists or medical professionals but this is what's gotten us this far without any major incidents, so we just have to stick with it," she said.

She and her colleagues are hopeful someday soon COVID and vaccinations won't be a factor.

"And hopefully then it's all gone and everybody can come back and we don't have to talk about it ever again- but that just doesn't feel like it's right now, said Gislason.

They're just one of a number of Seattle restaurants that posted on social media that they plan to continue checking for proof of vaccination.

Gislason said they aren't trying to make anyone feel uncomfortable and they hope customers will be amenable and understanding.

"When you operate a bar, you try to avoid politics at all costs because drinking and politics is dangerous, but for us, it's the safety of first and foremost the staff," Gislason said.

Gislason said The Octopus Bar had to close for two weeks in December as cases skyrocketed after she got sick and the rest of the staff followed.

"So out of safety we closed for a couple weeks and surprise, all of a sudden they tell us we can get rid of the vax cards, but it feels like yesterday that we just closed," she said.

They do expect to let the mask mandate go away, considering people tend to have their masks off once they're eating or drinking anyway, and they hope to end the vaccination requirement when everyone is comfortable. But for now, they hope people will bear with them and respect their staff.

"Whatever hyper-consciousness I had of the staff before is even more so, because I mean when that vaccine mandate first started we had door guys that were just getting berated, it was all pretty rough," Gislason said. "We got through that and the last thing I'm gonna do is go back and then go through it again."

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HEADLINE	03/03 Mayor acknowledges Seattle 'is unsafe'
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/seattle-mayor-city-council-members-public-safety-issue/281-9bab29c8-2d3e-4b39-975d-eaf226cd4af1
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — It is rare for the elected leader of a major American city to acknowledge there is a public safety problem in their city, but Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell declared in an interview this week, "It is unsafe."</p> <p>On Thursday, Seattle Councilmember Sara Nelson echoed the assessment, who along with her council colleague Andrew Lewis agreed to an interview with KING5 on the corner of Third and Pine, where there has been rampant open-air drug dealing, retail theft, and assaults.</p> <p>"I see an intersection of failed policies," said Nelson.</p> <p>"We have a lot of work to do," acknowledged Lewis, on the first day of a defined police emphasis in the corridor.</p> <p>Third Avenue has been a criminal hotspot for years, but this week flared up again, with a series of shootings and stabbings. Business owners have threatened to close, or have done so already, because of the unchecked activity in the heart of downtown.</p>

On Thursday, the Seattle Police Department (SPD) parked a mobile precinct in the middle of the street, across from Century Square, and the visible criminal activity seemed to dissipate. Seattle's police chief hinted more was to come.

However, it comes at a time when the police department is understaffed, by Interim Seattle Police Chief Adrian Diaz and Mayor Harrell's accounts.

"SPD has lost 27% of its force in the last two years," said Nelson, who is in the first few months of her term, and believes there is a connection between the reductions and the rise in crime.

"Yes, I do think physical presence is necessary," she said, "We need to reform the police, but we need to keep people safe. You can do both things."

Lewis takes exception when asked about the fact that he was on the council that voted to cut SPD jobs and reallocate resources in 2020.

"What I did is move parking officers to SDOT," he said. "What we're seeing right now is it's not going to be enough to have police presence downtown although that's necessary and that's part of it."

The council members also said they're ready to dust off a dormant plan to rebuild and remodel Third Avenue. The 'Vision' first pitched by the Downtown Seattle Association in 2019, sought to revitalize and brighten the transit corridor with trees and improved pedestrian thoroughfares. The momentum stalled as the pandemic unfolded.

"Now is the time to look at old ideas, put forth new ideas," said Nelson, while standing on the corner near a Walgreens store staffed with security because of the recent issues.

"Law enforcement presence is necessary, it's not sufficient in and of itself. These are systemic issues we've had on Third Avenue, whether the police department is at 1,300 or a thousand."

Both Nelson, who is a city-wide representative, and Lewis, who represents Downtown, said those kinds of big changes, which would revitalize the corridor filled with boarded-up buildings, won't happen overnight, but immediate changes should also be expected.

"I hope the council and the mayor are going to be able to answer something in the coming months," said Lewis.

"Stay tuned," added Nelson.

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HEADLINE	03/03 King Co. buys 10th property for homeless
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/homeless/king-county-kirkland-hotel-purchase/281-ec24d4f2-5746-4000-8915-a0cacf2d508c
GIST	<p>KIRKLAND, Wash. - After assessing the property for more than a month, King County moved forward Thursday and purchased La Quinta Inn & Suites in Kirkland for its Health Through Housing program.</p> <p>It will be the 10th property purchased for the program, which aims to rapidly develop permanent supportive housing for homeless residents by buying apartment buildings and hotels.</p> <p>The hotel, which is the second Health Through Housing purchase on the county's eastside, will provide at least 121 units of housing, bringing the program's total to nearly 1,000 units.</p> <p>"Expanding our network and partnering with communities, we are building a regional solution to chronic homelessness, and opening doors to a home for hundreds of people in King County," said King County Executive Dow Constantine in a Thursday statement.</p>

In early February, Kirkland City Manager Kirk Triplett posted to the city's Facebook page to [voice support for opening the hotel](#) to the homeless after residents began asking questions about the project.

Kirkland Mayor Penny Sweet said in a statement Thursday, "The conversion of this hotel into permanent supportive housing continues Kirkland's commitment to being a safe, inclusive and welcoming community where everyone belongs and will save lives. We look forward to continued collaboration with the County, Executive Constantine, and the community to ensure this site is a safe, successful part of the solution that addresses the growing homelessness humanitarian crisis in our region."

The county and city will partner to schedule public meetings this spring to give community members a chance to give input. One concern from residents in the past was that the property, located at 10530 Northup Way, is adjacent to Eastside Preparatory School. Others said they believed the project would lead to more police activity.

The county said it plans to improve the building and work with the city and community to establish a "Good Neighbor Agreement."

As for its future residents, the hotel will offer 24/7 onsite staffing that will provide them with case management as well as services for both behavioral and physical health.

The county anticipates the hotel will welcome its first residents in 2023 following a competitive process to find the onsite service provider.

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HEADLINE	03/03 Brier PD hiring unvaccinated officers
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/unvaccinated-law-enforcement-brier-police-department/281-2f593baa-3710-4753-96ce-d4784b22891b
GIST	<p>BRIER, Wash. — The City of Brier is seeing more people apply for it's police department because it doesn't have a vaccine mandate.</p> <p>Comments made at a city council meeting have sparked debate over whether the city should be considering one.</p> <p>"I have a King County Deputy that is in the [hiring] process right now. He got let go for the vaccine mandate," said Brier Police Chief Nick Almquist during the February 22 Brier City Council Meeting, "That was the same for the lieutenant position, he was let go for the mandate."</p> <p>Brier, a city of just 7,000 people, has been struggling to fill its six-person police force. It recently hired Nick Almquist as the city's police chief. Almquist is looking to fill three positions, which is half the department.</p> <p>Mayor Dale Kaemingk said residents are adamant the city have its own force. Right now it's relying on the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office for assistance.</p> <p>"Because having our own Briar Police Department is so important. I felt that was a really great thing for him to work on and he has brought some really strong candidates. So we're excited about that," said Kaemingk.</p> <p>Kaemingk believes the new chief is interviewing four candidates. At least three of the candidates Almquist mentioned during the February 22 council were fired from their previous jobs because of the vaccine mandate.</p>

	<p>During the meeting councilmember, Martin Krienke voiced his concerns about hiring unvaccinated officers. Councilmember Valerie Roman said it could become a problem if there's an outbreak within the department. Councilmembers also discussed whether there would be an issue with public perception.</p> <p>The comments and discussion led to debates on community pages from residents about whether the county should issue a mandate. Kaemingk said he isn't aware of any future action to formally consider a COVID-19 vaccine mandate.</p> <p>He argues he's not aware of any law enforcement department in Snohomish County requiring the vaccine.</p> <p>"So we're looking for applicants, and basically competing with other cities," said Kaemingk. "We're considering applicants whether they're vaccinated or not."</p> <p>In a letter to the city, the mayor said he's received the vaccine and encourages others to get vaccinated. He added the COVID-19 cases in Snohomish County are declining and that the CDC has relaxed its indoor masking recommendation.</p> <p>"I do recognize and respect the fact that Brier citizens have diverse and often strong opinions on this matter. The greatest personal influence in my life was my dad. He was the Mayor of the City where I grew up. He taught me by example to first be a good listener and work hard at understanding the position of those I disagree with. I am trying my best to heed his advice," Kaemingk wrote in the letter.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Striking concrete workers rally in Seattle
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/striking-concrete-workers-hold-rally-seattle/JI7V3OMX7BBENLNHC5Q7XUB3FM/
GIST	<p>Striking concrete workers held a large protest outside the Japanese consulate in Seattle on Thursday, where teamsters are demanding foreign intervention.</p> <p>Much of the strike involves a company named CalPortland, which is owned by a Japanese company, Taiheiyo Cement.</p> <p>Teamsters gathered at the Japanese consulate on Thursday to up the pressure against them.</p> <p>The strike has been getting international attention, especially as the striking teamsters turn their focus to the Japanese business.</p> <p>The latest mediation with CalPortland took 13 and a half hours and ended with “a 15% offer,” which a representative called “nothing more than a slap in the face.”</p> <p>Strikers said the strike is much more than a story about business, but it’s affecting their livelihoods.</p> <p>Four other concrete companies that have been impacted by the strike issued a response, saying workers were offered an 18% increase in wages over a three-year period, and it was rejected by the union.</p> <p>Striking workers insist they deserve better.</p> <p>The strike has now lasted more than three months, impacting projects such as the West Seattle Bridge.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Crystal Mountain hikes ski pass prices
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/crystal-mountain-hikes-ski-pass-prices-announces-expansion/KQKMTIY5AVAP7DPXQOTW7YSSR4/

GIST	<p>Crystal Mountain Resort in Washington state said Thursday that an unlimited ski and snowboard season pass for the next winter will cost hundreds more than this season.</p> <p>The pass will cost \$1,699, with a \$100 discount for those renewing from this season, a steep increase from the current season in which full-price season passes cost \$999, The Seattle Times reported.</p> <p>The news coincided with the announcement of a major capital investment in the busy ski area near Mount Rainier National Park by owner Alterra Mountain Company.</p> <p>Notably, the new Crystal Legend Pass will not be a member of the Ikon family, which provides access to some 45 ski destinations worldwide. It will cost an additional \$300 to add an Ikon Pass onto the new all-access Crystal pass.</p> <p>Crystal announced the price hike in tandem with a five-year capital plan to invest \$100 million in the resort, including 700 new parking spaces, a 100-room hotel, unspecified new trail and lift upgrades, new off-site employee housing and two new base lodges. The infrastructure investment will begin in April, when the resort intends to break ground on a \$25 million, 25,114-square-foot lodge with new dining, retail and ticket-sales facilities.</p> <p>Passholders next season also will pay for parking unless they carpool.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 What is a Russian oligarch?
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/what-is-a-russian-oligarch/
GIST	<p>The U.S. Justice Department has created a task force to go after the assets of Russian oligarchs, with the Biden administration vowing to seize their yachts, luxury apartments and private jets. But what are oligarchs? And how is their wealth connected to Russia's invasion of Ukraine?</p> <p>What is a Russian oligarch?</p> <p>Oligarchs — or extremely wealthy business leaders who are politically connected — became more prominent in Russia in the 1990s, but they are not unique to Russia.</p> <p>Many Russian oligarchs are heavily involved in and benefit from Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime, with some serving in political positions.</p> <p>For example, when Putin opened a new bridge to Crimea in 2018 — a region Russia had annexed from Ukraine in 2014 — the bridge was built by his friend Arkady Rotenberg's company and the truck he drove across it was made by Sergei Chemezov's state corporation Rostec, according to The Carnegie Moscow Center, a think-tank that focuses on domestic and foreign policy.</p> <p>There is often a line of succession for oligarchs in politics. For example, Dmitry Patrushev, the son of Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev, was appointed as Russia's minister of agriculture, according to The Carnegie Moscow Center.</p> <p>Numerous Russian oligarchs and government officials were sanctioned by the U.S. in 2018, in part for the regime's occupation of Crimea and for continuing to instigate violence in Ukraine, according to the U.S. Treasury Department, which announced the sanctions. Rotenberg's son and Patrushev were included in that round of sanctions for their involvement with the regime.</p> <p>"Russian oligarchs and elites who profit from this corrupt system will no longer be insulated from the consequences of their government's destabilizing activities," Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin said in a press release about those sanctions.</p> <p>Why are some oligarchs being sanctioned now?</p>

The Justice Department says the new multi-agency initiative known as [Task Force KleptoCapture](#) aims to enforce the sweeping sanctions, export restrictions and economic countermeasures that the United States and its allies and partners have imposed on Russia following its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

The sanctions are designed "to isolate Russia from global markets and impose serious costs for this unjustified act of war, by targeting the crimes of Russian officials, government-aligned elites, and those who aid or conceal their unlawful conduct."

"To those bolstering the Russian regime through corruption and sanctions evasion: we will deprive you of safe haven and hold you accountable," Deputy Attorney General Lisa O. Monaco said in a press release. "Oligarchs be warned: we will use every tool to freeze and seize your criminal proceeds."

While the task force aims to hold the sanctioned Russian elite accountable following the country's invasion of Ukraine, tracking down and seizing their assets will not be easy.

These extraordinarily wealthy and powerful individuals — including Vladimir Putin himself — have taken elaborate steps to [protect their wealth](#) around the globe.

Some oligarchs are trying to dodge penalties by [moving assets](#) — like their mega-yachts — into territories where sanctions don't apply and where their property cannot be seized or their assets frozen.

What happens now?

Financier and anti-corruption advocate Bill Browder told CBS News senior investigative correspondent Catherine Herridge that the goal is to get oligarchs to pressure Putin to stop the war. "We're not ready to engage in military warfare, so there's an expression we should fight them in the banks if we can't fight them with tanks," Browder said.

[Some wealthy Russians](#) have spoken out against Putin's attack on Ukraine. Mikhail Fridman, who founded one of Russia's largest private banks, said he does not believe war should be a solution.

Evgeny Lebedev, the son of an oligarch and owner of London's Evening Standard, ran a statement on the front page of his newspaper under the headline, "President Putin, please stop this war."

"As a Russian citizen I plead with you to stop Russians killing their Ukrainian brothers and sisters. As a British citizen I ask you to save Europe from war," [wrote Lebedev](#), whose father, Alexander Lebedev, is a former KGB agent turned bank owner.

Another Russian business mogul, [Oleg Deripaska](#), took to the messaging platform Telegram to share his statement. He is considered an ally of Putin, but wrote that "peace is very important" and talks to end the war should begin "as soon as possible," according to The Associated Press.

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HEADLINE	03/03 South Asia seeks normalcy amid decline
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/life-south-asia-returns-normal-covid-cases-decline-83246001
GIST	<p>The markets are crowded again. Traffic is jamming the roads. Migrant workers have returned to the cities. And young people are back at schools and universities — many of them for the first time in years.</p> <p>It isn't quite how things were before the COVID-19 pandemic — mask mandates still exist in some places — but with infections steadily declining, life in South Asia is returning to a sense of normalcy.</p> <p>The mental scars from last year's delta-driven surge persist — especially in India, where health systems collapsed and millions likely died — but across the region high vaccination rates and hope that the highly contagious omicron variant has helped bolster immunity are giving people reasons to be optimistic.</p>

While experts agree that opening up was the right move amid falling case numbers, they caution that optimism should be tempered with lessons from the past two years.

Dr. Gagandeep Kang, an infectious disease expert at the Christian Medical College in Vellore city in southern India, said the government should start preparing now for the next medical emergency, “whether that is COVID-19 or something else.” She said that new variants remain a concern, especially if the virus mutates into a more lethal version while retaining its infectiousness.

Those concerns were put aside in Nepal this week, as hundreds of thousands of people gathered at the Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu for a festival of the Hindu god Shiva.

“I had to wait for hours — since morning — and was finally able to visit the temple,” said Keshav Dhakal, a pilgrim.

Sri Lanka's pristine beaches are full again. Young people sway to music and devour spicy curries with friends. Some restrictions remain on the island — masks are mandatory in public places — but the government hopes that foreign tourists will return soon, helping bolster its faltering economy.

The island nation was so short of hard currency during the pandemic that authorities had restricted imports of cars and fertilizer. Now it's using its dwindling reserves to pay for ever more costly oil needed to keep the economy running.

“I am happy that life has come back,” said Ruwan Chamara, a construction worker who says he has attended several concerts in recent weeks after nearly two years of “living in an open prison.”

The Indian government's focus is also on economic rejuvenation. Apart from the loss of human life, the pandemic also made millions poorer, including many who were among the most vulnerable. The stringent lockdown, announced with a few hours' notice in 2020, forced thousands of people to walk home to their villages from the cities where they worked. Those workers have now begun returning to cities, as activity picks up at factories and construction sites.

“Because of the lockdowns, we have nothing. If we don't work, we don't eat. If we don't eat, we die,” said Devendra Kumar, a young laborer working at a construction site in New Delhi.

Kuldeep Singh Tomar, 38, who owns a shoe shop in New Delhi, said that sales have increased from around \$400 daily in January to twice that in February. Before the pandemic, he said he'd earn over \$1,300 daily.

In Bangladesh too, people are cautiously taking off their masks while dealing with the fallout of the pandemic. For many, the virus itself now feels like a minor problem compared to others people are facing, such as inflation and job losses, said Mir Arshadul Hoque, a former student at Dhaka University.

“Overall, I think people have mentally distanced themselves from the coronavirus,” he said.

But no amount of distance can fully eradicate the difficult memories of the past two years: the overwhelmed hospitals, the overflowing cemeteries, the exhausted doctors.

“The last two years were unbearable for us,” said Habibul Bashir, a former captain of Bangladesh's cricket team.

“We definitely don't want to go back to earlier times,” he said.

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HEADLINE	03/03 EU clears Moderna for children 6-11yrs old
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/eu-clears-moderna-shot-young-kids-pfizer-boosters-83226044

GIST	<p>AMSTERDAM -- The European Medicines Agency said it has authorized Moderna's coronavirus vaccine for children aged six to 11, in addition to recommending booster shots of Pfizer's vaccine for those aged 12 and over, in decisions aimed at providing further protection against COVID-19 for children across Europe.</p> <p>At a press briefing Thursday, the EU regulator's vaccines chief Dr. Marco Cavaleri said the Moderna vaccine for younger children will be a half-dose of what is given to older teens and adults. He said research showed young children had an immune response comparable to that seen in older populations "as measured by the level of neutralizing antibodies" against the COVID-19 virus.</p> <p>Cavaleri said the Moderna shot was also being recommended for use as a booster dose in people who had received other vaccines. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was previously granted a green light for use in children aged five and over last November.</p> <p>Cavaleri said data from countries including Israel and the U.S. in more than 400,000 children showed that a third dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in children 12 was safe and effective.</p> <p>"No new safety signal was identified," he said, adding that scientists looked in particular for cases of heart and chest inflammation, side effects that have previously been linked to the shot. "Those cases were very rare and most (people) recovered without intervention."</p> <p>Children are typically at much lower risk of severe coronavirus disease but are still vulnerable amid high levels of transmission.</p> <p>Cavaleri also said while some European countries have started offering their older populations a second booster dose based on concerns their immunity may fade quicker, the EMA has made no such recommendation. He said "at this stage, there is not enough evidence to establish the need for a second booster dose in the general population."</p> <p>In recent weeks, COVID-19 cases and deaths across much of Europe have dropped significantly after peaking in late January. But numbers are still rising in some places with lower vaccination rates elsewhere, including Russia and Turkey.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Doctors: new challenge if 4th dose needed
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/millions-unboosted-covid-public-health-experts-face-tricky/story?id=83211554
GIST	<p>When the first coronavirus vaccines were shipped out across the country more than a year ago, millions of Americans waited eagerly for their turn to get a shot, hoping that it would lead to a return to normal.</p> <p>In the spring of 2021, after every adult became eligible for the vaccine, over 2 million people a day were getting their first dose. However, in recent months, with most of those willing to get their shots now inoculated, vaccination rates have plummeted.</p> <p>The number of Americans who are receiving their first COVID-19 vaccine now stands at a pandemic low, with fewer than 80,000 Americans initiating vaccination each day. Further, since December, the rate of people getting boosted has also fallen significantly, dropping from 1 million booster shots administered a day to less than 140,000.</p> <p>"Dropping of local vaccine mandates and the end of the omicron surge are likely contributing to a stalling out in first time vaccines and boosters," said John Brownstein, Ph.D., an epidemiologist at Boston Children's Hospital and an ABC News contributor. "Unfortunately, at this point, there are not many tools left in the toolbox to encourage people to be up to date."</p> <p>Although there are certainly fewer unvaccinated than vaccinated people in the U.S., tens of millions of Americans remain unvaccinated and unboosted. Across the country, more than 58 million eligible</p>

Americans remain unvaccinated, while 87.6 million Americans -- about half of those currently eligible to be boosted -- have yet to receive their supplemental dose.

Amid the declining interest, some scientists and health officials say it is possible Americans could need an additional booster this fall, or seasonal boosters in the future, to address waning vaccine immunity or new coronavirus variants.

"The potential future requirement for an additional boost or a fourth shot for mRNA or a third shot for J&J is being very carefully monitored in real time, and recommendations, if needed, will be updated according to the data as it evolves," White House chief medical adviser Dr. Anthony Fauci during a press briefing last month.

The experts interviewed by ABC News are concerned about how to convey that message while maintaining trust as well as how additional doses might further exacerbate inequities in access and care around the country.

Since the fall, immunocompromised Americans have already had the option to receive a fourth mRNA dose. However, for the general public, the benefit of additional doses still is not clear.

In an interview with Bloomberg TV last week, Fauci said that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is studying data on a "month-by-month basis," and should durability rates continue to fall, officials will have to decide whether to begin offering a fourth dose, particularly to those at higher risk, such as the elderly.

However, even if data emerges indicating the need for a fourth dose, convincing Americans to get another shot may present a new set of challenges.

"I think we can expect to see less uptake of fourth doses than we saw of third doses," Dr. Shira Doron, an infectious disease physician and hospital epidemiologist at Tufts Medical Center, told ABC News. "A change in the messaging around the goal of the vaccination program would help a lot."

Some people point erroneously to the increase in breakthrough infections as a reason to not get vaccinated, she said.

Thus, experts say, it is important for public health experts to emphasize the benefit of vaccination, and how dramatically reducing the risk of developing severe illness or dying if infected.

In December, a period of omicron dominance, unvaccinated people were 14 times more likely to die of COVID-19 compared to people who received the one-shot Johnson & Johnson shot or two shots of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

Health experts also caution that if a fourth dose is eventually needed, it will be important for health officials to outline what the purpose of an additional dose would be.

"Are we trying to prevent all infections, or are we trying to prevent severe disease?" Doron asked. "Public messaging that is honest about the waning effectiveness for infection and focuses on a need for additional doses only when effectiveness against severe disease has waned, and only for those populations in whom that has happened, might help restore trust and increase vaccine uptake."

Evidence exhibiting protection against severe illness and death, will ultimately be paramount, Brownstein added.

"Clinical data, combined with real-world evidence, must show that additional shots provide critical protection against severe illness and death," he said.

Experts are particularly concerned about the continued growing racial disparity in the current booster drive, and the impact such gaps in uptake could have on populations that are already at increased risk of severe COVID-19 outcomes.

Black and brown Americans are currently lagging in the booster effort, with only 39.5% of eligible Hispanic/Latino Americans boosted, and 43.8% of eligible Black Americans boosted. Asian Americans lead every race/ethnicity group, with 58.9% of the eligible population boosted.

"Vaccine rollouts have highlighted critical inequities in access and education, leading to concerning differences in vaccination rates across race and ethnicity," Brownstein explained.

If additional shots are needed in the future, experts worry about deepening inequities.

"A fourth shot strategy is likely to only further inequities in protection unless accompanied with direct efforts to bring the entire population up to date," Brownstein added.

As health officials plan for the months and years ahead, Doron suggested there are several potential ways to proceed, including switching to an annual vaccination should a seasonal pattern with COVID-19 emerge or waiting for continued signs of waning effectiveness and recommending a fourth dose then, particularly to those at high risk.

"Any determination that additional booster doses are needed will be based on data available to the agency," a representative from the FDA told ABC News in a statement.

Regardless of how officials decide to move forward, experts say it will be essential to convince Americans of the importance and benefits of vaccines, and thus, that low COVID-19 vaccination rates could not only undermine recovery prospects, but potentially also lead to another surge of infections in the advent of a new variant.

"The case for a fourth shot needs to be incredibly compelling, if we expect the American public to get on board," Brownstein said. "The focus should continue to be on primary care providers and frontline health care workers to continue to educate the public on the value of vaccines."

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HEADLINE	03/03 Maryland apartment explosion: 10 injured
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/official-10-hospitalized-maryland-explosion-fire-83231381
GIST	<p>SILVER SPRING, Md. -- Ten people were taken to hospitals and several remain unaccounted for following an explosion and fire at a Maryland apartment building Thursday morning, authorities said.</p> <p>Firefighters responded to the Friendly Garden Apartments in Silver Spring, just outside Washington, D.C., about 10:30 a.m.</p> <p>Video footage from a nearby resident's outdoor security camera shows an explosion obliterating an end unit of one building.</p> <p>Steven Inman was cooking in a nearby apartment when he heard the blast.</p> <p>"We heard the bang, loud shake. I see that the building is gone. My father yells out to me and I was already running over here," he said.</p> <p>Inman said he helped a woman and her small child get out of the building and found another woman with third-degree burns over much of her body.</p> <p>Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service Chief Scott Goldstein said 10 people were taken to the hospital, three with serious injuries.</p>

“We do have several unaccounted for. I do not have a number to provide you at this point,” Goldstein said at an afternoon news conference.

“Our focus is to remain here until everybody is accounted for,” he added.

The building that exploded, as well as those immediately adjacent to and across from it, have been declared unsafe to reoccupy. The three buildings are home to roughly 100 people, Goldstein said.

Goldstein said there were “possible indications of alerts” by search dogs, which could indicate bodies or survivors could be in the rubble of the exploded building. Crews will need to bring in heavy machinery to remove an unstable freestanding wall in order to facilitate the search, he said.

Video from the scene showed flames shooting from the roof of a building and debris scattered on the ground.

Goldstein indicated that most of the flames had been extinguished by Thursday afternoon.

Authorities were hoping to escort residents back into the buildings that have been declared unsafe later Thursday so that they could retrieve belongings before being taken to shelter or hotels, and to allow residents to reoccupy three other buildings.

“It’s kind of scary looking at the extent of the explosion and it’s hard not to imagine the impact it’s had on people,” said Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich. “It’s definitely a tough day.”

Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan tweeted that his team has been in contact with county officials about the explosion, and that the state fire marshal, state police and state emergency management officials were offering their support.

Authorities have yet to determine the exact origin or cause of the blast, but Goldstein said there had been no prior 911 calls regarding the odor of gas or a gas leak on the block since at least Jan. 1 of last year.

Washington Gas, a utility that serves the area, said it was aware of the incident and that its personnel were assisting the fire department.

“As always, the safety of our customers and community is our top priority,” the company said in a statement. “We are supporting the active investigation and do not have further details to share at this time.”

In 2016, two children and five adults were killed, and 68 people sent to the hospital, after an explosion and fire at the Flower Branch apartments a few miles away. After a three-year investigation, National Transportation Safety Board officials said Washington Gas’ faulty equipment was the most likely cause of the explosion. Washington Gas disputed the board’s findings.

The board also found multiple communication gaps and missed opportunities to correct the leak that might have prevented the 2016 explosion. People around the complex smelled natural gas six times in the weeks and months before the explosion, but nobody ever called the gas company to report a possible leak, investigators said.

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HEADLINE	03/04 Russia shells Ukraine nuclear power plant
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/refugee-count-tops-million-russians-besiege-ukraine-ports-83221624

GIST

KYIV, Ukraine -- Russian forces shelled Europe's largest nuclear plant early Friday, sparking a fire as they pressed their attack on a crucial energy-producing Ukrainian city and gained ground in their bid to cut off the country from the sea.

Leading nuclear authorities were concerned — but not panicked — about the damage to the power station. The assault triggered phone calls between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and U.S. President Joe Biden and other world leaders. The U.S. Department of Energy activated its nuclear incident response team as a precaution.

The attack on the eastern city of Enerhodar and its Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant unfolded as the invasion entered its second week and another round of talks between the two sides yielded a tentative agreement to set up safe corridors to evacuate citizens and deliver humanitarian aid.

Nuclear plant spokesman Andriy Tuz told Ukrainian television that shells were falling directly on the facility and had set fire to one of its six reactors. That reactor is under renovation and not operating, but there is nuclear fuel inside, he said.

Firefighters cannot get near the flames because they are being shot at, he said, and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba tweeted a plea to the Russians to stop the assault and allow fire teams inside.

"We demand that they stop the heavy weapons fire," Tuz said in a video statement. "There is a real threat of nuclear danger in the biggest atomic energy station in Europe."

The assault renewed fears that the invasion could damage one of Ukraine's 15 nuclear reactors and set off another emergency like the 1986 Chernobyl accident, the world's worst nuclear disaster, which happened about 110 kilometers (65 miles) north of the capital.

U.S. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm tweeted that the Zaporizhzhia plant's reactors were protected by robust containment structures and were being safely shut down.

In an emotional speech in the middle of the night, Zelenskyy said he feared an explosion that would be "the end for everyone. The end for Europe. The evacuation of Europe."

"Only urgent action by Europe can stop the Russian troops," he said. "Do not allow the death of Europe from a catastrophe at a nuclear power station."

But most experts saw nothing to indicate an impending disaster.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said the fire had not affected essential equipment and that Ukraine's nuclear regulator reported no change in radiation levels. The American Nuclear Society concurred, saying that the latest radiation levels remained within natural background levels.

"The real threat to Ukrainian lives continues to be the violent invasion and bombing of their country," the group said in a statement.

Jon Wolfsthal, who served during the Obama administration as the senior director for arms control and nonproliferation at the National Security Council, said the plant's reactors have thick concrete containment domes that should protect them from tank and artillery fire.

But he too was concerned about a potential loss of power at the plant, which could imperil its ability to keep the nuclear fuel cool.

The mayor of Enerhodar said earlier that Ukrainian forces were battling Russian troops on the city's outskirts. Video showed flames and black smoke rising above the city of more than 50,000, with people streaming past wrecked cars.

Prior to the shelling, the Ukrainian state atomic energy company reported that a Russian military column was heading toward the nuclear plant. Loud shots and rocket fire were heard late Thursday.

“Many young men in athletic clothes and armed with Kalashnikovs have come into the city. They are breaking down doors and trying to get into the apartments of local residents,” the statement from Energoatom said.

Later, a livestreamed security camera linked from the homepage of the Zaporizhzhia plant showed what appeared to be armored vehicles rolling into the facility’s parking lot and shining spotlights on the building where the camera was mounted.

Then there were what appeared to be muzzle flashes from vehicles, followed by nearly simultaneous explosions in surrounding buildings. Smoke rose into the frame and drifted away.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal called on the West to close the skies over the country's nuclear plants. "It is a question of the security of the whole world!" he said in a statement.

The U.S. and NATO allies have ruled out creating a no-fly zone since the move would pit Russian and Western military forces against each other.

Vladimir Putin’s forces have brought their superior firepower to bear over the past few days, launching hundreds of missiles and artillery attacks on cities and other sites around the country and making significant gains in the south.

The Russians announced the capture of the southern city of Kherson, a vital Black Sea port of 280,000, and local Ukrainian officials confirmed the takeover of the government headquarters there, making it the first major city to fall since the invasion began a week ago.

Heavy fighting continued on the outskirts of another strategic port, Mariupol, on the Azov Sea. The battles have knocked out the city's electricity, heat and water systems, as well as most phone service, officials said. Food deliveries to the city were also cut.

Associated Press video from the port city showed the assault lighting up the darkening sky above deserted streets and medical teams treating civilians, including a 16-year-old boy inside a clinic who could not be saved. The child was playing soccer when he was wounded in the shelling, according to his father, who cradled the boy’s head on the gurney and cried.

Severing Ukraine's access to the Black and Azov seas would deal a crippling blow to its economy and allow Russia to build a land corridor to Crimea, seized by Moscow in 2014.

Overall, the outnumbered, outgunned Ukrainians have put up stiff resistance, staving off the swift victory that Russia appeared to have expected. But a senior U.S. defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Russia’s seizure of Crimea gave it a logistical advantage in that part of the country, with shorter supply lines that smoothed the offensive there.

Ukrainian leaders called on the people to defend their homeland by cutting down trees, erecting barricades in the cities and attacking enemy columns from the rear. In recent days, authorities have issued weapons to civilians and taught them how to make Molotov cocktails.

“Total resistance. ... This is our Ukrainian trump card, and this is what we can do best in the world,” Oleksiy Arestovich, an aide to Zelenskyy, said in a video message, recalling guerrilla actions in Nazi-occupied Ukraine during World War II.

The second round of talks between Ukrainian and Russian delegations was held in neighboring Belarus. But the two sides appeared far apart going into the meeting, and Putin warned Ukraine that it must quickly

	<p>accept the Kremlin's demand for its “demilitarization” and declare itself neutral, renouncing its bid to join NATO.</p> <p>Putin told French President Emmanuel Macron he was determined to press on with his attack “until the end,” according to Macron's office.</p> <p>The two sides said that they tentatively agreed to allow cease-fires in areas designated safe corridors, and that they would seek to work out the necessary details quickly. A Zelenskyy adviser also said a third round of talks will be held early next week.</p> <p>Despite a profusion of evidence of civilian casualties and destruction of property by the Russian military, Putin decried what he called an “anti-Russian disinformation campaign” and insisted that Moscow uses “only precision weapons to exclusively destroy military infrastructure.”</p> <p>Putin claimed that the Russian military had already offered safe corridors for civilians to flee, but he asserted without evidence that Ukrainian “neo-Nazis” were preventing people from leaving and were using them as human shields.</p> <p>He also hailed Russian soldiers as heroes in a video call with members of Russia's Security Council, and ordered additional payments to families of men killed or wounded.</p> <p>The Pentagon set up a direct communication link to Russia's Ministry of Defense earlier this week to avoid the possibility of a miscalculation sparking conflict between Moscow and Washington, according to a U.S. defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity because the link had not been announced.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Ukraine, Russia talks end; no ceasefire
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/2nd-round-talks-russia-ukraine-end-cease-fire/story?id=83226054
GIST	<p>Peace talks resumed on Thursday between Russia and Ukraine as both sides left the several hours of negotiations without a cease-fire agreement and war continuing to rage.</p> <p>The Russian and Ukrainian delegations gathered in the Brest region of Belarus for the second round of talks in four days.</p> <p>"The second round of negotiations is over. Unfortunately, the results Ukraine needs are not yet achieved," Ukraine's presidential adviser, Mykhailo Podolyak, tweeted following the meeting.</p> <p>Russia's foreign minister said that Russia will continue to insist that any peace agreement with Ukraine must include a promise that Ukraine will "demilitarize." Russia has also signaled it wants to discuss Ukraine adopting a "neutral status" and agree to abandon its ambitions of joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).</p> <p>Prior to the meeting, Podolyak posted on Twitter that Ukraine's priorities in the talks are an "immediate cease-fire," an armistice and "humanitarian corridors for the evacuation of civilians." Ukrainian officials have previously said they want Russia to withdraw all troops from Ukraine.</p> <p>Following the meeting, Podolyak tweeted the talks did produce a "solution only for the organization of humanitarian corridors."</p> <p>During a televised briefing on Thursday with foreign journalists, including ABC News, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Russia is ready to negotiate.</p> <p>Lavrov said Russia would continue its military operation while the talks were ongoing, saying it cannot allow "military infrastructure" to remain in Ukraine as a threat to Russia.</p>

He said any peace agreement must include a point on Ukraine's "demilitarization."

Zelenskyy on Thursday expressed no interest in demilitarizing and issued a warning to Russian [President Vladimir Putin](#).

"You will repay everything you did against Ukraine -- in full," Zelenskyy said in a televised news conference. "And we will not forget those who perished -- and God won't."

Zelenskyy said he is ready to meet and talk directly with Putin and repeated his calls for a ["no-fly" zone](#) over Ukraine immediately, saying it would act as a deterrent.

In an earlier statement posted on Facebook, Zelenskyy said, "We are a nation that broke the enemy's plans in a week" and praised his military forces and Ukrainian civilians who have taken up arms to defend the country.

"I sincerely admire the heroic civilians of Konotop, Bashtanka, Energodar, Melitopol (and) other towns and villages, who do not let the invaders in by blocking the roads. People come out in front of enemy vehicles. This is extremely dangerous. But this is brave. It is also salvation," Zelenskyy wrote.

But when asked at Thursday's news conference by ABC News senior foreign correspondent Ian Pannell how long Ukraine can hold out against the Russian advance, Zelenskyy said, "I don't know."

Putin said in a televised meeting of his National Security Council on Thursday that his "special military operation is going strictly in accordance with the schedule, with the plan."

"All objectives are being successfully attained," Putin said.

As he has done previously, Putin called Ukrainians and Russians "one people" and that his troops are fighting against "neo-Nazis," a claim that has been debunked by the United States and its Western allies.

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HEADLINE	03/03 Lawsuit: rising manatee deaths in Florida
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/environmental-groups-sue-rising-manatee-deaths-florida/story?id=83234234
GIST	<p>Environmental groups filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, claiming the agency has failed to help preserve Florida manatee habitats as the species faces rising deaths.</p> <p>Nearly 1,100 manatees died in 2021, which is roughly 20% of the east coast population of manatees, according to a lawsuit filed by Save the Manatee Club, the Center for Biological Diversity and Defenders of Wildlife.</p> <p>"We've now had almost 300 [die] in 2022," aquatic biologist Patrick Rose told ABC News. Rose is the executive director of Save the Manatee Club, the non-profit organization started by singer Jimmy Buffet in 1981 that is dedicated to protecting manatees and preserving their natural habitat.</p> <p>The group tells ABC News that popular waterways for manatees, like the Indian River Lagoon on Florida's east coast, have suffered years of pollution from sources like failed septic tanks, improperly treated sewage and fertilizer that deposits nutrients into the water.</p> <p>"That excess nutrient causes algal blooms that were so severe that it shaded out the seagrass that manatees and other species depend on. The seagrass died," Rose said.</p> <p>Manatees typically eat 100 to 200 pounds of seagrass and other plants every day, or roughly 10-20% of their body weight. With so little seagrass available, the manatees have been starving, and in 2021 U.S Fish and Wildlife declared the high number of manatee deaths "an unusual mortality event".</p>

According to the lawsuit, the Florida manatee was first listed as an endangered species in 1967, but to help protect the animals even further, USFWS designated areas where manatees are found as a “critical habitat” in 1976. Critical habitats are specific areas that have biological and physical features that are important for the survival of a species.

When the critical habitat was first established, important components of the habitat, such as the seagrass, were not taken into consideration, Rose said.

But by 2008, updated Congressional and USFWS definitions of a critical habit and new scientific information required that the manatee's critical habitat designation be adjusted, according to the lawsuit.

Environmental groups requested that USFWS update the term in 2008 and the agency agreed, but never followed through, according to the lawsuit.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service did not respond to an ABC News request for comment on the lawsuit.

Save the Manatee Club hopes the USFWS "will work with us now to ensure that seagrasses and warm water habitat are better protected to prevent a continuation of the devastating losses of so many manatees due the continuing loss of seagrasses, which are literally “critically important” to the future survival of manatees,” Rose said.

Save the Manatee is also appealing to the United States Environmental Protection Agency in hopes to upgrade water quality standards so that seagrass will not continue to die from pollution.

“Ultimately, we believe that we must use the provisions of both the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act to ensure that manatees are protected today and for the foreseeable future,” Rose said.

If the court rules in favor of the environmental groups, it will result in higher standards and stiffer penalties for those who pollute waters which kill seagrass. According to Rose, until the standards are raised, the manatees and their ecosystems will continue to be under threat.

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HEADLINE	03/03 More US sanctions on Russian oligarchs
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-announces-sanctions-russian-oligarchs-enable-putin/story?id=83231852
GIST	<p>The U.S. on Thursday announced new sanctions against members of the Russian elite, including Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, and said it would block 19 oligarchs and 47 of their relatives and close associates from traveling to the United States.</p> <p>The sanction targets include Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, as well as one of Russia's richest men, Alisher Usmanov, according to the White House.</p> <p>Germany had already seized Usmanov's superyacht, and the White House said both the boat and Usmanov's private jet -- which it said was one of the largest privately-owned aircraft in Russia -- would be blocked for use in the U.S. or by Americans.</p> <p>"These are significant steps that will impact the people who are closely around President Putin," White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters. "We want him to feel the squeeze. We want the people around him to feel the squeeze."</p> <p>President Joe Biden touched on the latest U.S. actions against Russia at the top of the fourth Cabinet meeting of his administration, saying the steps his administration and its allies have already taken are having a "profound impact."</p>

Biden said the Russian oligarchs being sanctioned "line their pockets with Russian people's money and while Ukraine and the people are hiding in subways from missiles that are being fired indiscriminately from Russian cities."

In a news release, the Treasury Department said it and the State Department had intensified pressure on Russia by "sanctioning numerous Russian elites and their family members, identifying certain property of these persons as blocked, and sanctioning Russian intelligence-directed disinformation outlets."

It said the elites sanctioned provided direct and indirect support to the Russian government through their business empires, wealth, and other resources. "The aid of these individuals, their family members, and other key elites allows President Vladimir Putin to continue to wage the ongoing, unprovoked invasion of Ukraine," the release said.

It described Usmanov as one of Russia's wealthiest billionaires with vast holdings across multiple sectors of the Russian Federation economy as well as internationally.

"Usmanov's Kremlin ties enrich him and enable his luxurious lifestyle. Evidencing his wealth, Usmanov owns one of the world's largest superyachts, known as Dilbar ... named after Usmanov's mother ... This superyacht's estimated worth is believed to be between \$600 and \$735 million. Dilbar has two helipads and one of the world's largest indoor pools ever installed on a yacht. The estimated cost to run Dilbar is \$60 million per year," Treasury said.

Usmanov's aircraft, an Airbus A340-300, the release said, is believed to have cost between \$350 and \$500 million.

Shortly after he arrived in Brussels for a full day of meetings Thursday with NATO, the G-7, and European Union counterparts, among other allies, Secretary of State Antony Blinken weighed in on the new sanctions.

"These actions make it clear there is nowhere to hide for individuals and entities that support Russia's flagrant war against Ukraine," he said in a statement.

The statement also said the Department of State is imposing substantial costs on Russia's defense enterprises by sanctioning 22 defense-related firms. "These far-reaching sanctions target entities that develop and produce fighter aircraft, infantry fighting vehicles, electronic warfare systems, missiles, and unmanned aerial vehicles for Russia's military. These sanctions strike at the core of Putin's war machine," he said.

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HEADLINE	03/03 Fed chair: Russia's war will worsen inflation
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Business/wireStory/feds-powell-russias-war-ukraine-worsen-inflation-83230954
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON -- Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell warned Thursday that Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has already driven up oil prices, will likely further magnify the high inflation that has engulfed the U.S. economy.</p> <p>At the same time, Powell said he is committed to doing whatever it will take to slow inflation, underscoring the Fed's high-risk challenge in raising interest rates enough to stem price increases without tipping the economy into another recession.</p> <p>The Fed chair, addressing the Senate Banking Committee on his second day of semiannual testimony to Congress on interest rate policies, stressed his belief that the economy is strong enough to withstand higher borrowing costs. His expression of confidence echoed his testimony Wednesday that the Fed can engineer a "soft landing" in which the economy would slow enough to ease inflation even while hiring and growth remain healthy.</p>

"Commodity prices have moved up — energy prices, in particular," Powell said when asked about the economic consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "That's going to work its way through the U.S. economy. We're going to see upward pressure on inflation, at least for a while."

Consumer prices are already rising at their fastest pace in four decades, having jumped 7.5% in January compared with 12 months earlier. Gas prices, a key driver of that increase, have soared 40% over the past year. In the view of most economists, the surge in inflation is largely a consequence of a shortage of labor and components resulting from bottlenecked supply chains, much of it resulting from the global economy's swift rebound from the pandemic recession.

Responding to a question from Sen. Steve Daines, a Montana Republican, Powell noted that inflation is generally thought to rise about 0.2 percentage point for each \$10 increase in the price of a barrel of oil. Oil prices have surged by \$40 a barrel since early December.

Sen. Richard Shelby, an Alabama Republican, urged Powell to do "what it takes" to control inflation. He praised Paul Volcker, who led the Fed in the early 1980s and who sharply increased the Fed's benchmark short-term rate to choke off the double-digit inflation of the 1970s. Volcker's actions also led to a deep recession in 1981-82.

Shelby asked Powell whether he, like Volcker, was willing to be "draconian" to "get the inflation under control and protect price stability."

Powell replied that Volcker was the "greatest economic public servant of the era" and added that, "I hope history will record that the answer to your question is yes."

But Powell stressed his belief that the Fed can bring down inflation without triggering a recession. The economy grew last year at the fastest pace since the 1980s, the Fed chair noted, the unemployment rate is at a low 4% and hourly pay is rising steadily, before adjusting for inflation.

Job openings are near a record high, Powell added, and Americans are quitting their jobs at a record pace, usually for better, higher-paying positions.

"This is a great labor market for workers, particularly for workers" among those in the lowest one-quarter of incomes, he said. For these workers, pay gains over the past two years have slightly exceeded price increases.

On Wednesday, Powell had said that he would propose a quarter-point rate hike at the Fed's next meeting in two weeks, which would be the first rate increase since 2018. The Fed chair repeated Thursday that if inflation didn't decline this year as he expects, he is open to bigger hikes at some later central bank meeting this year.

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HEADLINE	03/03 What happened to vax for kids under 5?
SOURCE	https://www.propublica.org/article/whats-holding-up-the-covid-vaccines-for-children-under-5?utm_source=sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=majorinvestigations&utm_content=feature
GIST	<p>As the United States relaxes pandemic restrictions, advising some 70% of Americans they no longer need to wear a mask, many parents of young children are desperate to know when they can expect a vaccine to be authorized for kids under 5.</p> <p>But opaque communication from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and drugmakers, on top of whiplash over the shifting timeline and unexpected delays, has led to confusion and angst. Some parents are obsessively tracking every press release, investor report and social media announcement to glean information, and a few have even lied about their kids' ages to get their children vaccinated. Many feel they are on their own.</p>

“I just feel like we are being left on Pandemic Island,” said Jen Wendeln, mother to a 3-year-old boy in Cincinnati. “They’ve sent rescue boats several times and then told us: ‘Never mind, none for your children. Don’t worry, we’ll come back, just keep waiting.’”

Parents have been told that vaccines for little ones are coming “soon” over and over. In September, Pfizer’s CEO Albert Bourla [said](#) that two-shot data for 2- to 4-year-olds would be available “before the end of the year,” with submission to the FDA soon after. That data turned out to contain [mixed](#) news, and timelines got pushed out as Pfizer added a third shot. Parents grew hopeful when Dr. Anthony Fauci [suggested](#) authorization could happen sometime in February, and momentum seemed to be gathering as the FDA [scheduled](#) a meeting of outside experts to review Pfizer’s data on Feb. 15 to consider authorizing two doses first while waiting for data on the third. In the latest twist, however, the FDA then delayed that meeting, saying that new information had led it to decide it was better to [wait](#) for more data.

All of this happened as first the delta variant, then omicron, sent an increasing number of children to the hospital, filling up pediatric wards. Some parents, hearing experts urge the public to get vaccinated as soon as possible to prevent catching the highly infectious variant, were frustrated not to have that option for their children. “I put my kids in car seats. I laid them on their back when they were babies so they wouldn’t suffocate,” said Dr. Amy Cho, an emergency room physician in Minnetonka, Minnesota. Knowing that vaccines are preventing deaths in kids over 5, it pains her that one isn’t available yet for her 3-year-old. “I couldn’t live with myself knowing I didn’t do everything I could to prevent that outcome,” she said.

Thousands of parents have turned to Facebook groups to share information and seek answers to their questions: Why the delay? When would the data become public? What is going on with the trials? Conspiracy theories have blossomed and rumors are rampant.

To bring some clarity to the conversation, I dug into FDA policy and asked officials at the agency, Moderna and Pfizer as well as pediatric vaccine experts the questions parents most want answered. What I learned dispels a widespread myth, adds context to the factors officials are deliberating and provides an update on timing.

Why Do Parents Want a Vaccine?

While children under 5 are much less vulnerable to the coronavirus than adults, they are not invulnerable to serious consequences. In the United States, more than 460 children under 5 have died of COVID-19, [according](#) to the CDC. They’ve [been hospitalized](#) and have died at a higher rate than kids ages 5 to 11, according to the agency. “It’s very frustrating for us, writing off kids who have died — what’s the acceptable number of child deaths for people?” asked Dr. Scott Krugman, vice chair of pediatrics at the Herman & Walter Samuelson Children’s Hospital at Sinai. “If it’s preventable, it should be zero.”

A source of anxiety for many parents is that it’s hard to predict which kids may have bad outcomes. While children with asthma or other lung conditions are more likely to suffer from pneumonia if they are infected, researchers still don’t know what puts a child at higher risk of suffering from multisystem inflammatory syndrome, or MIS-C. The condition, in which many different organs including the heart, lungs, kidneys and brains become inflamed, can be serious and even deadly. Children with no preexisting conditions are often the ones who experience MIS-C, Krugman said: “They’re perfectly healthy 4- or 5 year-olds who randomly show up with cardiac enzymes through the roof and who need close monitoring and support.” Some other children also experience symptoms that last for months.

Experts have been telling parents that they can keep their little ones safe by surrounding them with people who are vaccinated, boosted and masked. But many parents point out that restrictions are easing and people are becoming more active, so the risk is actually increasing for their children. As schools drop mask mandates as well, some parents are also worried that their vaccinated older kids could bring the virus home to their unvaccinated younger siblings.

“Things are getting less safe for those of us who cannot vaccinate our family members — knowing there are even fewer people wearing masks makes everything that much more dangerous for us,” said Chris

Nammour, father of a 2-year-old in Puyallup, Washington. So far, he's chosen not to send his daughter to day care. "Our world is very small."

What Exactly Does the FDA Consider Before Approving the Vaccine?

Many parents who want a vaccine say they don't expect perfection: They don't expect it to prevent infection, but want to lower the risk of the worst outcomes for their children, like hospitalizations or Long COVID. Emily Whittington is one of them. Her 4-year-old son, Jeremy, was born with a rare gene mutation that causes brain malformations and is particularly at risk of experiencing a seizure if he gets sick. Whittington lives in rural West Virginia and said that the low vaccination rate in her area has made her have to keep Jeremy out of pre-K to avoid exposure. "Can any of those doctors or advisory boards look me in the eye and say, 'Your son is better off getting COVID without the vaccine than with some protection?'"

But the agency isn't considering Whittington's situation in isolation; it has a far more complicated calculus to make. "In addition to those people who are really excited about getting their kids vaccinated, there are also a lot of people out there that are like ... I really want to know that, if the FDA tells me I'm going to have to give this to my kid or I should give this to my kid, I want to know that it really works," an FDA official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, told me. Only [1 in 4 children](#) ages 5 to 11 was fully vaccinated as of March 1, and [polling](#) has shown that about a third of parents want to "wait and see," while another third do not plan to get their child the shot.

"The challenge we have is, if we take something forward where there's tremendous controversy because the data are not really clear, there can be a lot of confusion in the public, and ultimately, it can be counterproductive for getting the population vaccinated," the official said. The FDA also considers what's going on in real time. When cases of omicron were surging and more and more kids were being hospitalized, the agency made an [unprecedented move](#) by saying it would consider authorizing two shots of the Pfizer vaccine for kids under 5 while waiting for the rest of the efficacy data on a third shot. The thinking was that those kids could get a head start on the vaccine series before the third shot was authorized. But the plan also hung on the presumption that the third dose would do the trick. What if Pfizer's three doses still weren't enough? Some experts worried that it was a risky move for the agency to take.

"If it didn't work out, the price they could pay could be a lack of confidence not just in the COVID-19 vaccinations but a spillover into other childhood vaccinations," said Dr. Peter Hotez, a pediatrician and dean for the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine. And what if a fourth or a fifth dose was ultimately needed? asked Dr. C. Buddy Creech, professor of pediatrics and director of the Vanderbilt Vaccine Research Program. "Do side-effect profiles go up when we do that? Does it change over time if you keep hammering the immune system with the same antigen over and over again?"

Pfizer, which was gathering data in real time, reportedly found that its shots were [less effective](#) against the omicron variant. With this new information in hand, the FDA decided to delay and wait for data from all three shots to come in before considering authorization. One factor in the decision was that risk for children overall has dropped as omicron cases have fallen. "In the midst of a huge surge, the benefit/risk [calculation] could be different than when you're now coming towards the tail of a surge," the FDA official said. "It doesn't change our essential considerations, which are that the vaccine has to show the safety that we need ... but it is true that the efficacy that we would expect, that could be a little bit different depending on the amount of disease that was circulating at a given time, the amount of hospitalizations, etc."

The agency has a challenging job of balancing the need for thoroughness with speed, said Dr. Paul Spearman, director of the division of infectious diseases at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. Children are not just little adults — their immune systems are different — so you can't just scale down the existing vaccine proportionally and presume it'll be both safe and effective. It's not unusual for children's vaccine trials to take longer than adults' because of additional steps needed to find the correct dosage for different age groups, Spearman said. "There's more care taken about safety and finding a precise dose, and more scrutiny, because it's a vulnerable population."

Ian Stone, parent of a 4-year-old in San Diego, said he's willing to wait for a vaccine. "I want it to be safe. I want it to be effective. I don't want it to be pushed forward because we have to have something," he said. But Stone, who works in public relations, said he thinks the unexpected delay "may cause more harm than good. It'll make people question and scrutinize it that much more. If it wasn't ready, I wish they hadn't gotten hopes up because you've drawn unwanted attention."

Is "Age De-escalation" a Real FDA Vaccine Policy?

Misinformation has further confused parents, causing unnecessary concern that vaccines will be further delayed.

In December, Pfizer [said](#) that two shots were found to be safe for all kids under 5, but while children under 2 generated antibody levels similar to what has been seen in 16- to 25-year-olds, the 2- to 4-year-olds did not hit the same bar for effectiveness. In response to the results, the drugmaker said it would start testing a three-shot regimen to see if that could increase the level of protection.

For parents of children under 2, the obvious question was: Why not authorize the shot for the babies first? It was surprisingly hard to get a clear answer to this question. A myth sprung up and circulated around the internet, printed in traditional media and repeated by doctors, that the FDA had a policy that prohibited it from authorizing vaccines for age groups out of order. It was referred to as an "age de-escalation policy."

Age de-escalation describes how some clinical trials are run, including the COVID-19 vaccine trials. Adults are enrolled first, and once the vaccines are proven safe and effective, then the trial extends to younger and younger age groups. This is important for a number of reasons including safety — adults and teens are better able to articulate side effects they may be experiencing, so if a side effect is identified as related to the vaccine, researchers can look out for that symptom in younger kids who may not be as articulate; a fussing baby, as every parent knows, can be difficult to interpret.

But when it comes to authorizing vaccines, that doesn't apply. "There's no such policy, and we would have been happy to skip an age group," the FDA official told me.

I also asked Pfizer why, then, it hadn't sought authorization for kids under 2 first. The oblique answer I got from a spokeswoman was: "We're continuing to study a third dose in this population." I asked for more information and was told, "If successful, we will pursue a three-dose series based on the ongoing late stage study."

So Pfizer is pursuing a three-dose series for all kids under 5. But why do that, if two doses had worked for the younger age group?

The FDA is [tightly limited](#) by regulation and cannot publicly discuss trial data before approval outside of specific circumstances, such as an advisory committee. That has accounted for much of the agency's reticence. The official could only tell me, enigmatically, that "eventually it will become clear that there was not a way to skip an age group here." Perhaps something in Pfizer's data in infants made the drugmaker or FDA determine it wasn't sufficient for authorization, but until data becomes public, it is impossible to know.

As for Moderna, authorization of its vaccine for 12- to 17-year-olds has been held up in the U.S. because of concerns that it could cause myocarditis, inflammation of the heart muscle. Moderna is now testing a smaller dose for adolescents and 6- to 11-year-olds, but in the meantime, the company has said that it expects data from its trial of kids under 5 in March.

Parents, again confused by the supposed age de-escalation policy, have speculated that Moderna could not ask the FDA for authorization for the youngest kids before the teens had access to the vaccine.

Not so, a Moderna spokesperson told me: “Once the data are available in this age group, Moderna will review the data and decide whether to file for Emergency Use Authorization independent of whether other EUA submissions currently under review have already been approved.”

What’s Next for Vaccines for Small Children?

Here’s the good news: Two companies could have data on vaccines in kids under 5 in a matter of weeks. Pfizer has said it’ll have data on three doses “in spring” and Moderna has said it’ll have data by the end of March. If the data looks good, there’s nothing to stop the FDA from authorizing a vaccine for kids of a certain age group, even if an older cohort misses the mark or hasn’t yet gotten the green light. Creech, who is also a principal investigator for Moderna’s pediatric vaccine trials, and Spearman both told me they expect authorization by April or, in a worst-case scenario, May.

The bad news is that this far into the pandemic, communication is still floundering in the face of a public that is increasingly distrustful of scientists and federal health agencies.

It’s true that the FDA is legally limited in discussing data particulars and manufacturers are traditionally secretive about ongoing trials. But nobody has acknowledged that the legal and conventional restrictions mean that answers to basic questions like, “Why was this review delayed?” tend to result in impenetrable answers like, “We realize now in data that came in very rapidly because of the large number of cases of omicron that at this time it makes sense for us to wait until we have the data from the evaluation of a third dose.” None of this helps the public understand the scientific process.

What is apparent is that while many parents would like to see more data, what they want even more is to be reassured that their kids’ health is a priority.

“They’ve never spoken to parents of underage kids to say: ‘We’re sorry this is so hard. It grieves us too that it’s been so complicated,’” said Jennifer Martin, a parent of three in Seattle. “There’s a lack of urgency,” said Samirah Swaleh, parent to a 9-month-old boy in the Los Angeles area. “They just don’t seem to care about babies and toddlers?!” wrote Wendeln, the mother in Cincinnati. Cho, the emergency room physician, longs for a clearer timeline. “If you’re running a marathon and you know there’s an end, people can do amazing things. But it’s really, really hard when you don’t know if there’s an end in sight.”

I brought these sentiments to the FDA official I spoke to. The response hit many of the notes the parents said they wanted. I wish it could have come earlier, more often and been on the record, but I hope it provides some parents a bit of reassurance that they’ve been heard.

“We are going to work as expeditiously as possible,” the official said. “What does that mean? In general — though I can’t promise anything — you’ve seen that after an EUA [application] in this area, we generally are trying to take action in two to four weeks.”

The official emphasized: “We’re not going to be sitting on anything here.”

“I would want parents to know that we understand their concerns. We’re parents too,” the official added. “We are going to move as fast as we can once we have the data in our hands.”

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	03/03 Anonymous first week #OpRussia offensive
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/cybersecurity/anonymous-claims-more-than-2500-targets-hacked-in-first-week-of-oprussia-offensive/
GIST	More than 2,500 websites linked to the Russian and Belarusian governments along with state-run media, banks, hospitals, airports, and companies have been hacked in the week since the Anonymous collective

declared that they launched cyber operations against Russia in response to the invasion of Ukraine, a prominent Anonymous account reported this evening.

The antiwar hackers have also gone after pro-Russian hackers, swiping and leaking thousands of internal chats from the Conti ransomware group, as well as military communications and more. “IP cameras were put in place to monitor #Ukrainian movements,” one Anonymous account posted on Twitter. “We made sure to lock the Russians out of their own little spying devices by changing their default passwords and knocking their stuff offline.”

And Anonymous accounts reported that they’re now battling Russian disinformation and trolls. State-affiliated Russia Today declared that “Anonymous gets a taste of its own medicine” as pro-Kremlin hackers “struck back at both Anonymous and Ukrainian pages,” prompting Twitter accounts associated with the collective to note that Anonymous is a decentralized movement with no official website, channel or social media platform. Access was blocked to the RT article this evening.

Anons also said pro-Russian elements were circulating a hit list to report their social media accounts en masse, trying to get #OpRussia hackers deplatformed. Ukraine supporters without hacking skills were urged to hijack hashtags that were trending on Twitter earlier today in support of Russia and President Vladimir Putin, and use them to distribute content showing the truth about Russia’s attack on Ukraine.

Hackers were using #OpRussia, #OpKremlin, and similar hashtags to announce actions against Russian sites, similar to the #OpISIS campaign that targets the terror group’s deluge of online propaganda and the #OpKKK campaign that targets white supremacists.

Latest cyber ops claimed by hackers include breaching and leaking files from the Rosatom State Atomic Energy Corporation, taking down the official portal of the pro-Putin government in Crimea, and broadcasting Ukraine’s national anthem on Gazprom Media Radio. The Russian government portal was also down this evening.

Data dumps were posted that were said to have come from hacks on sites including banking, manufacturing, and Belarus state-owned CTV.

Hacker v0g3lSec posted files that they said came from a private service hosted by Russian State Space Corporation “Roscosmos” and contained space agency data on the Luna-Glob moon exploration program. They also left a message on a website connected to Russia’s Space Research Institute warning to “leave Ukraine alone else Anonymous will f*ck you up even more.”

NB65, a hacking group affiliated with Anonymous, claimed earlier that it [breached the control center](#) of Roscosmos and cut off the agency’s control over its spy satellites as part of the ongoing cyber-offensive. “And we’d do it again,” the group tweeted today.

“You must understand that there’s more to hacking than defacing a website or DDoSing a server,” NB65 also tweeted. “Every bit matters but we aren’t going to give you live overview of network hacks. Then the company will just patch.”

An Anonymous video posted Feb. 15 threatened to “take hostage” industrial control systems if the crisis escalated, and since #OpRussia began hackers have claimed [breaching](#) a Russian Linux terminal and gas control system in Nogir, North Ossetia. One Anonymous account posted a long list that they said was IP addresses and ports for industrial control systems in Russia.

“WaterKotte control panel systems found in Russian g0v n3tw0rk,” another Anonymous account tweeted Tuesday. “Let’s just say we’ll be having a little bit of fun with the control panels.”

The Belarusian Cyber-Partisans, which said on Twitter that it hacked railway systems in Minsk, Orsha, and Osipovichy to obstruct Russian military movements toward Ukraine from the country, said Tuesday that the rail cyber-attack continues: “Automated Dispatcher systems are’t functioning. New networking

equipment (switches, routers) that were brought to replace old ones got infected. Dispatching system Neman is affected. All trains are delayed.”

One Anonymous video on Tik-Tok explained that their hacking couldn’t defuse the nuclear threat, though: “Because so many have asked: No, it is not possible to hack Russia’s nuclear weapons and render them harmless.”

Members of the collective posted a video press release Saturday that vowed “these actions will continue,” as “activists will not sit idle as Russian forces kill and murder innocent people trying to defend their homeland.”

The hackers acknowledged that “some of our actions may be considered illegal in the eyes of various governments,” but they saw “no reason any western laws should be used against our actions in trying to protect and defend the people of Ukraine, and also to help educate the people of Russia.”

DHS’ Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and the FBI issued [a joint Cybersecurity Advisory](#) Saturday providing an overview of destructive malware that has been used to target organizations in Ukraine as well as guidance on how organizations can detect and protect their networks. An intelligence brief from the Department of Homeland Security in January [warned](#) stakeholders that Russia “would consider” launching a cyber attack against the United States if the U.S. or NATO respond to Russia’s potential invasion of Ukraine in a way that the Kremlin perceived as threatening to Russian security.

“If things continue as they have been in the past few days,” said one new Anonymous video on Tik-Tok, “the cyber war will be expanded and our measures will be massively increased. This is the final warning to the entire Russian government. Don’t mess with Anonymous.”

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HEADLINE	03/03 Russia leaks data from a thousand cuts
SOURCE	https://threatpost.com/russia-leaks-data-thousand-cuts-podcast/178749/
GIST	<p>It’s not just Ukraine: There’s a flood of intel on Russian military, nukes and crooks, says dark-web intel expert Vinny Troia, even with the Conti ransomware gang shuttering its leaking Jabber chat server. Information about nuclear plants and air force capabilities.</p> <p>Conti ransomware gang crooks conjecturing that the National Security Agency (NSA) was maybe behind the mysterious, months-long TrickBot lull. Doxxed data about 120K Russian soldiers.</p> <p>Those are just some of the sensitive, valuable data that’s being hacked out of Russia in the cyber war zone – a war that erupted even before the country invaded Ukraine.</p> <p>“Everyone is so focused on Russia hacking the world, but the world has been hacking Russia.... And dumping a lot of critical data on military, nuclear plants, etc.,” said Vinny Troia, cybersecurity Ph.D. and founder of ShadowByte, a dark web threat intelligence and cyber fraud investigations firm.</p> <p>He’s one of an untold number of experts on dark-web threat intelligence who’ve been pouring over the intel that’s been flooding out of practically every nook and cranny of the internet: data that’s being posted on Twitter, Telegram and within the multiple dumps of insider knowledge about the Conti ransomware gang posted by the Ukrainian supporter ContiLeaks.</p> <p>That ongoing dump, which has included source code for Conti and TrickBot, a decryptor (that doesn’t help recent victims whose files have been encrypted by the Conti gang, unfortunately), and much more, stopped yesterday when the Conti gang shut down its Jabber servers, Troia told Threatpost on Wednesday.</p> <p>He visited the Threatpost podcast to update us on the mountain of data about Russia that intelligence experts are now slogging through.</p>

You can download the podcast below or [listen here](#). For more podcasts, check out Threatpost's [podcast site](#). Also, see below for a lightly edited transcript.

Lightly Edited Transcript

Lisa Vaas: Listeners, welcome to the Threatpost podcast. My guest today is Vinny Troia, cybersecurity PhD and founder of ShadowByte, a dark web threat intelligence and cyber fraud investigations firm. Today, we're going to focus on all of the data that's being leaked on Russia as a result of its invasion of Ukraine.

Lisa Vaas: Thanks for coming on the podcast. Vinny, before we jump in, could you give us a bit of your background, please?

Vinny Troia: Sure. Thanks for having me. Yes. So my background I come from a DOD background did a lot of work for surface deployment command. And yeah, I was there for about, I think six or seven years before moving over to private sector.

Vinny Troia: And while I was there, I did a lot of work in compliance and random security hacking projects, a lot of red teaming, pen testing. And then eventually I started my own firm. Fast forward to today, our focus now is primarily dealing with a lot of ransomware cases, incident response, and we do a lot of ransom negotiations as well.

Vinny Troia: We're constantly focused on dark web threat actors and any of the players, really.

Lisa Vaas: Thank you for that. And well this past week must be just a flurry with the dark web activity around Ukraine and Russia. So in an email, you were talking about how everyone is so focused on Russia hacking the world, but the world has been also hacking Russia and dumping a lot of critical data on military nuclear plants, etc.

Lisa Vaas: Where is your Intel coming from? Are there any forums in particular that you're clued into or is that something you can't even discuss?

Vinny Troia: It's not even like that. It's a, I mean, it's literally everywhere. I mean, there's Telegram channels. I mean, some is just being pasted right on Twitter.

Vinny Troia: I mean, it's literally coming from all angles at this point.

Lisa Vaas: Well, tell me what you're seeing.

Vinny Troia: I'd say last month, there was a lot of data coming out about Ukrainian citizens. I mean, a lot. So that was kind of interesting, almost like a precursor to what was happening.

Vinny Troia: And now it's almost like, the rest of the world that's really pissed and started hacking back and you're seeing so much data coming out. I'm actually looking for sorry, as we speak, I'm going through some of this data. I mean, there's stuff on a nuclear plants, some of their air force capabilities.

Vinny Troia: There's another database that I just recently came across that is about a hundred thousand of their military members with photos, passport numbers, things like that. I mean, it's really just data coming from all depths of. From other infrastructure,

Lisa Vaas: well, who, who, who is the primary sources?

Lisa Vaas: I mean, I know that anonymous of course has jumped in to, to, to wage war on behalf of Ukraine, cyber war on behalf of Ukraine. And I know that you can put out a call for help from cyber experts on this too. So who, who exactly is, is. Hacking this stuff out of Russia.

Vinny Troia: I mean, I, honestly, I couldn't tell you, I mean, it's coming, like I said, it's coming from all sorts of places.

Vinny Troia: Right. And when things get leaked, I mean, they just get leaked from various [sources'] usernames on forums or Telegram channels. And so you never really know who it's coming from. It is interesting that the world kind of banded together against this. And Russia was supposed to have this big cyber arsenal against them.

Vinny Troia: And it's really funny that Joe Biden didn't mention security once in the state of the union last night, being that it was such a big deal and everybody's been talking about it.

Lisa Vaas: Yeah. And, and I remember it was an NBC news last week or, or was reporting on the big cyberattacks, the major offensive cyberattacks that were being discussed at the White House, but then the White House denied [considering offensive cyberattacks].

Vinny Troia: The news has been all about cyberattacks and Russia's capabilities and it's such a priority, but it just wasn't even mentioned once. I just, I find that really strange, but regardless, it's nice that the world kind of banded together to really come after Russia. One of the most, honestly, just incredibly fascinating things is all these leaks that have been occurring regarding the Conti ransomware. Yes. And they're arguably the largest or at least one of the top few largest ransomware groups in the world. And I mean, they're just having everything leak: source code, recovery, keys, chat logs.

Vinny Troia: I mean, as early, as recently as today with the most recent chat logs that came out, so somebody still has access to their servers and I haven't even had a chance to read the ones from today.

Lisa Vaas: I just wrote up the second dump and I didn't even know there was more posted today. It's so hard to keep up. Can we talk a little bit about those dumps? Now as I understand it, it's the decryptor for version two of the Conti Lock ransomware software [that was leaked]. That's not even going to be usable to anybody because it was for an older version.

Lisa Vaas: How is this going to affect Conti? Another one of my sources was telling me that just one of the gang's groups got hit by this [leak] and everybody else is pretty much doing fine. They're carrying on business as usual.

Vinny Troia: I think what's really interesting. And they talked about this in one of the, in some of the logs. So Conti uses, or used, this one piece of software called TrickBot in order to disseminate and ... one of the or groupings of the chat log showed that the NSA came after TrickBot specifically.

Vinny Troia: I don't know whether or not they reverse engineered or what they did, but I mean, they were able to shut it down for a couple of weeks just by changing patch numbers and uploading them to a server that would accept the changes. And so what they did was they maxed out the maximum patch number.

Vinny Troia: The software couldn't take any new updates at that point. So they effectively shut it down for a little bit. That was actually really amazing.

Lisa Vaas: I totally missed that. Which repository was that in? What's the name of the repository?

Vinny Troia: It's all JSON files.

Lisa Vaas: Everybody knew that TrickBot pretty much shut down for a few months, but I didn't know that about the NSA piece.

Vinny Troia: It's presumed to be the NSA, given the level of skill that was involved, we'll call it finesse. I would say it would have to be some government agency.

Lisa Vaas: Was there chatter about the shutdown?

Vinny Troia: Yeah, it's basically a handful of officials talking about it and how they were shut down and how they basically had to rebuild their infrastructure.

Vinny Troia: They were down for a little bit and eventually they came back, but it just shows that they were being targeted by nation states. I think the most interesting thing is, if this really is a Russian operated group, which is what it seems like, then the fact that all these files are being leaked, whether it's from an insider or somebody who's a researcher who's attacking them specifically, I think this is going to have a major toll on Russia's finances, especially considering this is a group that is averaging what, a couple hundred million dollars a year recurring revenue?

Lisa Vaas: I don't expect you to know this, but maybe you do: How much of Russia's economy is actually coming from ransomware or other malware?

Vinny Troia: I think the majority, actually. So I think the majority of Russia's economy is coming from some sort of crime. There's not a whole lot going on over there. It's like a big wasteland,

Lisa Vaas: Right. The underground members say "protect the motherland, the motherland protects you. "Except for when they need some stooges to arrest, some low-level stooges to make the U.S. happy, which happened recently.

Vinny Troia: As far as the decryptor [goes], you're correct. It is for an older version. I think I saw some keys floating around as well, but new code is written on top of old code and it's not like it was replaced completely. So I would imagine that there will be some fallout from that code base.

Lisa Vaas: Yeah, there's a lot of code to go through. I hear. So what were some other really great finds in the intelligence that we're getting out of Russia during this crisis?

Vinny Troia: It's information on citizens, it's information on military members. I've seen things on nuclear plants. I can't speak to what can be done with all of it, honestly, but the point is it's there and, in the right hands, I'm sure it could be pretty useful.

Lisa Vaas: I assume, during these days, it's just not going to let up.

Vinny Troia: No, and like I said, a couple of hours ago we had more leaks from their Jabber server. So I would imagine whoever has access has been able to pull off a lot, and I think [Conti] actually just shut it down finally.

Lisa Vaas: So that means they they shut down Jabber. That doesn't mean that they figured out who the leaker is. Right?

Vinny Troia: The person leaking it goes by [ContiLeaks]. But whether or not he's the one with access, I don't know. But the point is they figured out that somebody did have access to their Jabber logs. So now they've moved servers.

Lisa Vaas: Well, awesome. What else can you tell listeners? What can you leave us with?

Vinny Troia: I would say that, just because Conti's out doesn't mean that the problem is going away anytime soon. So be diligent and keep up with your passwords and make sure that you actually have fresh passwords, because looking at these logs and how they're getting into a lot of these systems, it's just using other people's recycled passwords.

Vinny Troia: The hacks they're using aren't even that sophisticated. And I mean, even now the majority of hacks are still caused by reused passwords.

Lisa Vaas: We can get some intelligence out of the exploits that they're targeting. I think I saw Zerologin was mentioned as one, and of course we know a lot about their tooling right now. Like the whole Cobalt Strike beacon thing.

Vinny Troia: Cobalt Strike's been a red teaming tool forever. It's a staple. For pen testers, it's an amazing tool. And so the fact that they were using it isn't really a surprise.

Lisa Vaas: Well, is there anything surprising that was found in the dumps? I know that we've got email addresses of some of the members of the gang.

Vinny Troia: You can use that to look for other accounts and potentially start to reverse back to maybe who they are. But I mean, there's so much information here. I haven't even gone through maybe a 10th of it. It's coming up too fast. It's a full-time job. It takes a full-time team at this point to go through all of this. Because then there was another thing that came out: rocket chat logs from a rocket chat. There's thousands of logs here.

Lisa Vaas: Yeah, that's pretty bad. When you've got a researcher, an intel expert who says he's getting too much: The firehouse is open so wide. So the takeaways for listeners are that these leaks haven't stopped, and we don't even know how many that [ContiLeaks] is promising.

Vinny Troia: I mean, the fact that today's leaks caused the shutdown, I presume caused a shut down of their Jabber server. I'm going to say that well has pretty much run dry. I don't know what else is going to be released in terms of tools, but I'd say all of this has probably put a dent in everything they're doing for a little bit.

Lisa Vaas: We can hope so, but I don't think we should assume anything. And that's what you're telling us: They're still going to be active and they're going to retool anyway. Right. And will resurface.

Vinny Troia: Yeah. I was going to say, giving credit to [security journalist Brian] Krebs on this one, one of the things he reported on was that there was a conversation, and I haven't even made it to the set about how the ransomware groups were being investigated.

Vinny Troia: And someone high up in the group basically told them they didn't have anything to worry about. The investigation was going to go off of them. And that was right around the time that Russia took down REvil. So it was interesting. It's almost like they had insider information, or maybe they literally were working for [Russia].

Lisa Vaas: I think REvil. that takedown, was the one I was thinking about when I alluded to this kind of token law enforcement action on Russia's part to maybe make the U.S. shut up. Now I have to go read Brian Krebs. Why didn't I read Brian Krebs earlier today? I have to do that. That's like a requirement of the job. OK, well, Vinnie, unless you've got anything else to add, I'm going to let you go.

Vinny Troia: No, all good.

Lisa Vaas: I appreciate it. Thank you so much. Thanks for coming on the podcast.

030322 10:49 UPDATE: ContiLeaks, the source of the Conti leaks, is not believed to be the same entity as vx_underground, which has disseminated the leaked files.

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HEADLINE	03/03 CISA: flaws impacting medical devices
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/device-security/bd-discloses-hard-coded-flaws-impacting-some-pyxis-viper-medical-devices

GIST	<p>The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) issued an alert for the healthcare and public health sectors on vulnerabilities found in certain BD Pyxis and Viper LT products that could enable the access or modification of sensitive information.</p> <p>The first is a severe flaw found in versions 2.0 and later of the BD Viper LT system, an automated specimen processing and integrated molecular testing tool. The device uses hard-coded credentials, which could allow an attacker to access, modify or delete device data, including protected health information and personally identifiable information.</p> <p>CVE-2022-22765 is ranked 8.0 in severity and has a low attack complexity. The flaw is not exploitable remotely and there are currently no known public exploits specifically targeting it.</p> <p>BD simultaneously issued an alert for another hard-coded vulnerability found in a long list of its Pyxis automated medication dispensing systems. A successful exploit could allow a threat actor to gain access to protected health information or other sensitive data.</p> <p>The flaw could enable “access to the underlying file system and exploit application files for information that could be used to decrypt application credentials or gain access” to sensitive information. The alert also notes that BD manages the credentials, which aren’t visible or used by customers to access the impacted devices.</p> <p>CVE-2022-22766 has a 7.0 base score for severity.</p> <p>BD's recommendations for voluntarily reported flaws</p> <p>BD voluntarily reported these flaws to CISA and is currently working on remediating the hard-coded issues. The vendor intends the alert to raise awareness of the flaw and its recommended compensating controls for systems using hard-coded credentials.</p> <p>Entities should make sure to implement physical access controls for the impacted Viper LT devices, while ensuring only authorized end-users can access the impacted systems. Where applicable, the system should be disconnected from network access. If access is necessary, entities should use standard network security policies and procedures.</p> <p>BD recommends entities secure the impacted BD Pyxis products by using compensating user controls, including limiting physical access to authorized personnel, tightly controlling the management of system credentials, isolating the impacted devices, and monitoring traffic.</p> <p>Entities are encouraged to work with the vendor or recommended remediation steps and to ensure all patching and virus definitions are up to date. Disclosures are critical to the healthcare sector’s ability to maintain the security of highly complex medical device security infrastructures. While challenging, working with the vendor directly on best practices can expedite the process.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Top impersonated brands for phishing 2021
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/news/cybercrime/facebook-microsoft-were-the-top-two-impersonated-brands-for-phishing-attacks-in-2021
GIST	<p>The "Phishers' Favorites" report released by Vade on Thursday found that Facebook (now Meta) was the No. 1 impersonated brand in 2021, representing 14% of all phishing pages, followed by Microsoft with 13%.</p> <p>The report also found that Microsoft was the No. 1 most impersonated cloud brand. Vade researchers said Microsoft phishing attacks sharply increased in sophistication in 2021, with a June attack leveraging automation to populate corporate logos and branding onto Microsoft 365 phishing pages.</p>

On the vertical sector front, financial services was the most impersonated industry of 2021, with six brands in the Top 20 that represented 35% of all phishing pages. Chase, PayPal, and Wells Fargo were the most impersonated financial services brands. Other important findings:

- Mondays and Tuesdays are the top days for phishing.
- 78% of phishing attacks occur on weekdays.
- Monday and Thursday are the top days for Facebook phishing.
- Thursday and Friday are the top days for Microsoft phishing.

Organizations and employees are bombarded with phishing emails, some which clearly evade email security, explained Saryu Nayyar, founder and CEO of Gurukul. Nayyar said with the sophistication and deceptions used by threat actors, invariably someone will click on one of these emails, compromising an organization.

“The goal of many of these attacks is to either steal credentials or establish a footprint to begin an attack campaign for data theft, disruption or ransomware detonation,” Nayyar said. “Because of this, many CSO's understand that the initial compromise is almost inevitable and we are seeing a shift from evaluation and investment in preventive measures to a larger focus on threat detection and incident response.”

George McGregor, vice president at Approov, pointed out that all of these brands are also heavily dependent on mobile apps. McGregor said cloned and modified apps are increasingly being used as an attack vector with fake or modified apps used to steal consumer data and divert transactions.

“The phishing problem is no longer only about fake web-pages, and it’s imperative that security teams evaluate and reinforce the protection of their mobile apps against cloning and manipulation,” McGregor said.

Patrick Harr, CEO of SlashNext, said Vade’s data runs in line with what his team has been seeing. However, Harr said SlashNext’s threat lab has seen more targets to Microsoft products vs. Facebook, having seen a 57% increase from Q4 2021 to the first months of 2022.

“The interesting point about the times of the week is all about the cybercriminal,” Harr said. “They work much like enterprises, working Monday to Friday, taking the weekends off. Our threat labs see phishing start to ramp up on Sundays in the U.S. because this is Monday morning in other parts of the world where much of the cyberattacks originate. It peaks on Monday and Tuesday and begins to taper off towards the end of the week.”

Hank Schless, senior manager, security solutions at Lookout, added that social engineering remains one of the biggest headaches that IT and security teams have to deal with. Schless said organizations need to implement a security strategy that protects users, devices, and data from the individual endpoint up to the cloud.

“These phishing attacks are particularly effective on mobile devices,” Schless said. “That's because smartphones and tablets have simplified interfaces that hide many red flags indicative of phishing attacks. They can also deliver phishing links through email, SMS, social media platforms, third-party messaging apps, gaming and even dating apps.”

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HEADLINE	03/04 Study: cybersecurity firms exposing assets
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/tens-cybersecurity-firms-found-exposing-their-assets-study
GIST	<p>Tens of cybersecurity companies expose a large number of assets to the internet, according to a study conducted recently by attack surface management firm Reposify.</p> <p>It’s not uncommon for major companies to unwittingly expose databases and other assets, but a study conducted by Reposify over a two-week period in January showed that 35 multinational cybersecurity</p>

companies and their more than 350 subsidiaries hosted over 200,000 exposed assets. These assets included [databases](#), remote access sites, and cloud services.

Reposify's analysis showed that 86% of these companies have at least one exposed remote access service, 80% expose network assets, and 63% expose back office internal networks. Just over half of the cybersecurity firms have at least one exposed database.

In a vast majority of cases, companies exposed platforms such as Nginx, Apache, OpenSSH, IIS and Portmap, which are "highly sensitive, and the consequence of a breach is severe — particularly in the case of the cybersecurity industry."

As for exposed remote access protocols, 90% of companies exposed OpenSSH, followed by RDP (47%), Telnet (33%), and SMB (30%).

The study showed that more than two-thirds of companies exposed PostgreSQL databases, and half exposed OracleDB databases.

Many cybersecurity firms and their subsidiaries also appear to expose storage and backup systems (FTP, S3), and development tools (Express, Jenkins, Tableau Server).

Nearly every cybersecurity company seems to host exposed assets on the AWS cloud platform (97%), followed by Azure (82%) and Google Cloud (76%).

One concerning finding is that — except for storage and web assets — a majority of exposed services are in the organization's "unofficial perimeter," which means they are less likely to be monitored.

"Services under unknown perimeters are less likely to be known, and often represent shadow IT, unknown risks, or flag a possible backdoor malactors can use to access a company's assets," Reposify said in its [report](#).

More than 40% of the vulnerabilities affecting exposed services have a "high" or "critical" severity rating. "Just one of these statistics is concerning enough — but the combination points to a sincere need for the industry to better practice what it preaches," Reposify said.

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HEADLINE	03/03 Hacktivists, criminals switch to Telegram
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/hacktivists-cybercriminals-switch-to-telegram-after-russian-invasion/
GIST	<p>Telegram messaging has taken a pivotal role in the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, as it is being massively used by hacktivists and cybercriminals alike.</p> <p>According to a report from cybersecurity company Check Point, the number of Telegram groups has increased sixfold since February 24 and some of them, dedicated to certain topics, have ballooned in size, in some cases counting more than 250,000 members.</p> <p>The following three categories are the main ones gaining in popularity all of a sudden as a direct result of the Russian invasion in Ukraine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Volunteering hackers who engage in DDoS and other kinds of cyberattacks against Russian entities• Fundraising groups that accept cryptocurrency donations allegedly for Ukrainian support• Various "news feeds" that promise to offer reliable reports from the front-line <p>Cyber-warfare</p> <p>The group that stands out among those that lead the anti-Russia cyber-warfare operations is the "IT Army of Ukraine", which currently counts 270,000 members.</p>

IT Army of Ukraine was [formed](#) by cyber-specialists in the country, and the results of its operation [became evident quickly](#).

Apart from launching DDoS attacks targeting key Russian sites, the group also exposes the personal details of opinion-makers in Russia and other people who play a significant role in the conflict.

Crypto-snatchers

Most of the self-declared “donation support” groups in Telegram are scams that take advantage of the situation to steal people’s money.

We have reported similar operations [relying on phishing emails](#), but the same thing manifests on Telegram too, with some of these groups having up to 20,000 members.

[Check Point reports](#) that the phenomenon is growing as more fraudsters jump in trying to seize the opportunity to scam well-intended individuals.

Unverified news

The third category that’s booming is news feeds that bypass mainstream outlets and post unedited, uncensored feeds from the war zone, 24/7.

Aside from the fact that publishing unedited war scenes breaches journalistic deontology, many of the news posted on these groups are not checked or verified and could very well be fabricated.

This is even a problem for vetted social media platforms as geopolitical analyst Michael Horowitz admitted when posting footage of a realistic-looking, computer-generated air dogfight created on a video game engine.

Check Point reports that these channels still amass a large number of users. For example, the ‘Ukraine War report’ has 20,000 members, while ‘Russia vs. Ukraine Live news’ has 110,000.

Another news channel aimed at exposing Russian war crimes, ‘Ukrainian Witness’ (Свидетель Украины), has reached 100,000 members.

The goal of the groups that purposefully disseminate false information on Telegram channels is to demoralize the enemy, hoping that the content will be posted on mainstream platforms too.

Some of these channels may post accurate information, but it’s nearly impossible for users to distinguish between real and fabricated reports.

Why Telegram?

Simply put, Telegram is very lightly regulated or moderated, so stopping abuse when flooded with new registrations is an unrealistic expectation.

This is why the platform is considered [a haven for cyber-criminals](#) who have been selling illegal material and even services to other pseudonymous users for years now.

Risk intelligence company Flashpoint has touched on this subject in [a recent report](#) claiming that 6 out of 10 Russians use Telegram precisely because their country’s authorities can’t impose their oversight on the platform.

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) has been eagerly trying to block Telegram for years until they finally gave up in 2020.

If you are using Telegram, it would be advisable to trust only channels you have been visiting before the war started.

	<p>Additionally, you should treat all new requests with suspicion and avoid sending money to anyone no matter the claims and presented assurances.</p> <p>Finally, if you browse Telegram news feeds, avoid re-posting media or written content to other platforms unless you have been able to verify their validity.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Pressure: accelerated ransomware attacks
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/risk/accelerated-ransomware-attacks-pressure-targeted-companites-to-speed-response
GIST	<p>Ransomware attackers have taken a variety of incremental steps over the past year that have resulted in shorter infection-payload cycles — requiring businesses to more quickly respond to potential malicious behavior.</p> <p>In its "2022 Cyber Threat Landscape Report" published this week, Deep Instinct said that its data shows that execution, persistence, and privilege escalation were the top three attacker actions, as defined by the MITRE ATT&CK framework, suggesting that adversaries had focused on initial infiltration and payload execution as opposed to extensive lateral movement. In addition, the increased adoption of ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS), which is easily accessible on the Dark Web, has resulted in a 15% increase in detected ransomware threats, according to the report.</p> <p>The threat landscape is going to be extremely treacherous in coming months, especially as cyber operations escalate because of Russia's war on Ukraine, making defensive agility very important, says Shimon Oren, vice president of threat research and AI intelligence for Deep Instinct.</p> <p>"This means that prevention is more important than ever before," he says. "For certain types of attacks, if you do not have the right posture in place, and be able to detect and remediate very quickly, you will be vulnerable and the damage will already have been done."</p> <p>Ransomware Rules</p> <p>Cyberattacks and incidents are now the top concern for businesses in 2022, and ransomware is the top threat, with 57% of business professionals rating the surge in ransomware as their top concern, according to the recently released Allianz Risk Barometer 2022. Seven out of 10 financial firms had suffered a ransomware attack, with the average ransom topping \$91,000, although 70% of firms would or have refused to pay the ransom, according to Egress, a cybersecurity firm focused on insider threats.</p> <p>Ransomware has become an endemic threat for most companies. To mitigate the risk, companies need to harden their network, processes, and people, says Tony Pepper, the firm's CEO and co-founder.</p> <p>"The best advice is to stop the attackers getting in in the first place," he says. "Make it harder for them to gain access via email specifically — as the vast majority of malware is delivered using phishing emails. Implement the right technology to detect these attacks, and ensure that your people have the tools and the training to spot phishing attempts."</p> <p>Most companies, however, are focused on mitigating the overall business risk, rather than the specific cybersecurity dangers. While 83% of companies are spending on anti-phishing, 72% maintained a cyber-insurance policy, 64% retained outside legal counsel, and 55% invested in a forensic investigation, according to a report on executives' views on phishing published by Egress.</p> <p>Return on Investment</p> <p>For attackers, it's all about return on investment, hitting organizations that can afford to pay with multiple attacks. Currently, triple extortion — consisting of encrypting data, stealing data, and using a denial-of-service attack — is the favored method to pressure companies into paying. As long as the returns exceed the costs, ransomware will continue, says Rotem Salinas, senior malware researcher at CyberArk.</p>

"The ROI for ransomware is very high — both when targeting individuals or organizations — so I wouldn't expect a decline in attack volume," he says.

Attackers are definitely becoming increasingly sophisticated in ways of obfuscating their malware, making it harder to detect. Yet whether the attacker goes for a quick, impactful attack or a slower, stealthier spread depends on the attacker's motivations and goals.

In either case, the defensive focus should be on hardening the information-technology environment, preventing the attack, and automating the initial response, because otherwise the attacker will either quickly infect other systems or execute the payload, says Deep Instinct's Oren. The more companies can slow down the attacker, the better, he says.

"Strong prevention is critical," Oren says. "There is a lot of attacks that you will not be able to catch at a very early stage, and if you don't, then it's game over — the impact has been achieved. That's why there needs to be a much greater focus on the earlier stages of the kill chain."

In addition, with more expertise focused on providing ransomware-as-a-service, and a variety of leaked codebases allowing malware developers to build on one another, ransomware will continue to become more sophisticated and evolve quickly, CyberArk's Salinas says. In [a recent analysis](#) of leaked information on the Conti ransomware group, CyberArk's researchers found information about how the group operates as well as source code for some of the malware and tools used by the group.

"Now that Conti's source code [has been] leaked, it's likely new variants of the malware will be discovered in the near future," he says.

Conti is the fourth most common ransomware strain, according to Deep Instinct's "[2022 Cyber Threat Landscape Report](#)." The STOP and REvil malware families accounted for the vast majority of ransomware detected by the firm.

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HEADLINE	03/03 T-Mobile breach data spreads on dark web
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/t-mobile-breach-dark-web-warning-attorneys-general/
GIST	<p>The top law enforcement officials from multiple states are alerting people affected by an August 2021 breach at T-Mobile that their personal data might be circulating in cybercrime forums online.</p> <p>"Information stolen in a massive data breach has fallen into the wrong hands and is circulating on the dark web," New York Attorney General Letitia James said Wednesday in a news release. Officials from California, Florida and several other states issued similar warnings.</p> <p>The T-Mobile breach involved the data of tens of millions of current, former or prospective customers of the wireless company. The stolen data is attractive for identity theft and other financial crimes. The hacker who claimed responsibility for the breach told The Wall Street Journal in August that T-Mobile's security was "awful." Law enforcement agencies from multiple states are investigating the breach.</p> <p>In some cases, the hacker accessed people's names, dates of birth, Social Security numbers and driver's license or ID numbers. The company also said technical data — including international mobile equipment identities (IMEIs) and international mobile subscriber identities — were also compromised. IMEIs, which are often used for advertising purposes, are a unique fingerprint for a device that cannot be reset.</p> <p>The state attorneys general noted that identity protection services already have alerted many of the affected consumers about the dark web activity. Cybercrime forums have been under increased pressure by state, federal and international law enforcement agencies, but the buying and selling of people's personal data is still an active criminal industry.</p>

	States are advising people to take the usual steps if they fear their personal or financial information has been misused: check credit reports; consider contacting the Equifax, Experian and TransUnion credit bureaus to place freezes on personal credit reports; and ask credit reporting services to provide fraud alerts.
	The August incident was the fifth the company has suffered since 2018.
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HEADLINE	03/03 Tax season: identity theft, fraud crimes
SOURCE	https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2022/03/03/identity-theft-fraud-victim/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Now more than ever, life happens online. But, with greater connectedness comes enhanced risk. Millions of Americans fall victim to identity theft and fraud each year, resulting in billions of dollars in losses.</p> <p>“In today’s digitally connected world, cyber fraud and identity theft have become the ultimate crimes of opportunity: as quickly as vulnerabilities are detected and protected against, new ones emerge. Yet, few resources exist to help Americans, experts and the news media understand digital fraud and the latest attacks,” says Emily Snell, President of Allstate Identity Protection.</p> <p>To help solve for this, Allstate Identity Protection is launching a report designed to shine a light on the latest lines of attack being utilized by identity fraudsters.</p> <p>Many falling victim to identity theft and fraud</p> <p>Between October and December 2021, total identity theft and fraud cases increased by 11%, led by rapid spikes in instances of fraudulent credit and/or loan account creation, inquiries, and applications.</p> <p>Fraudulent creation of new credit and loan accounts grew by 61% from 2020 to 2021. By December 2021, this type of fraud accounted for over half of our total identity theft cases. Another 42% of cases from October to December 2021 were instances of credit and loan applications.</p> <p>Be on the lookout for disability fraud</p> <p>After defrauding the government agencies that handle unemployment fraud, scammers may be turning to the state-level agencies that oversee disability benefits. Between November and December 2021, there were open cases involving false disability insurance claims in California double compared to previous months.</p> <p>As this year’s tax season gets underway, Americans should watch out for signs of disability fraud. Victims may receive a letter related to disability benefits for which they did not apply, or an employer may notify the victim that someone has filed for disability in their name.</p> <p>Unemployment fraud on the decline</p> <p>Reports of unemployment and tax fraud continue to decline, with both constituting just 1% and 0.6%, respectively, of total remediation efforts between October 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021. Fueled by the pandemic, unemployment fraud at one point accounted for nearly three-quarters of all remediation cases.</p> <p>“Though steep drop-offs in unemployment and tax fraud are encouraging, we expect to see both on the rise again this tax season, as many victims of these types of fraud do not realize they have been targeted until they file taxes,” says Allstate Identity Protection VP of Product Lewis Bertolucci.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Ukraine: sites push fake capitulation news
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ukraine-says-local-govt-sites-hacked-to-push-fake-capitulation-news/?&web_view=true
GIST	The Security Service of Ukraine (SSU) said today "enemy" hackers are using compromised local government and regional authorities' websites to push rumors that Ukraine surrendered and signed a peace treaty with Russia.

SSU revealed this in [a tweet](#) further [distributed](#) by Ukraine's State Service for Special Communication and Information Protection (SSSCIP) to Ukrainian Twitter users.

"WARNING! ANOTHER FAKE! The enemy has broken into some sites of regional authorities and local governments and spreads through them lies about the alleged 'capitulation and signing of a peace treaty with Russia'," the SSU said, as Reuters first [reported](#).

The Ukrainian Parliament [also issued a similar alert](#), saying the Public Broadcaster News in Kherson was taken over with plans to spread disinformation about Ukraine surrendering and "signing of the peace treaty with the Russian Federation."

SSU [warned](#) Tuesday that Russia's Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces (also known as GRU) is using Telegram channels to disseminate fake information.

Ukraine also targeted by phishing, malware attacks

Since Russia's invasion, Ukrainian networks and organizations have been under a constant barrage of cyberattacks.

[The Computer Emergency Response Team of Ukraine \(CERT-UA\)](#) and [Facebook](#) warned of phishing campaigns against Ukrainian officials and military personnel.

Both attributed these campaigns to a hacking group tracked as UNC1151 or Ghostwriter and linked with high confidence by Mandiant researchers [to the Belarusian government](#).

On Wednesday, cybersecurity firm Proofpoint said it spotted [spear-phishing attacks targeting European government personnel](#) aiding Ukrainian refugees. This campaign aligns and is likely related to July 2021 phishing attacks also to the Ghostwriter hacking group.

Ukrainian officials are not the only ones targeted in such attacks, as SSSCIP revealed one day after the start of the war, saying that a separate series of phishing attacks also began [targeting Ukrainians with malicious documents](#).

These warnings come on the heels of malware attacks using [ransomware decoys](#) and destructive [HermeticWiper](#) and [WhisperGate wiper malware](#) aiming to destroy data on targets' devices and render them unbootable.

Ukraine's Vice Prime Minister Mykhailo Fedorov also [announced over the weekend the creation of an "IT army"](#) that would help the country "fight on the cyber front."

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HEADLINE	03/03 Cyberattack on New York ethics watchdog
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/cyber-attack-on-new-york-ethics/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>New York State's Joint Commission on Public Ethics (JCOPE) has been forced to shut down its systems following a "deliberate malicious cyber-attack."</p> <p>The ethics watchdog, which regulates lobbying at the State Capitol, said on Friday that an investigation had been launched to determine the scope of the attack and who was behind it.</p> <p>The alarm was raised at the beginning of last week by workers at the New York Office of Information Technology Services (ITS) who received an alert regarding suspicious activity on JCOPE's network. The Commission shut down systems, including its lobbying application and financial disclosure statement online filing system as a precaution.</p> <p>JCOPE said the attack was confirmed following "several days of preliminary forensic analysis by ITS."</p>

	<p>No timeline has been given as to when the systems will be back up and running, with JCOPE saying only that the systems will remain offline “until they can be brought back up safely.”</p> <p>An investigation into the incident has been launched. However, a suspect is yet to emerge.</p> <p>“We do not have any information at this time about who may have been behind the cyber-attack, and although we do not know yet if there was an actual breach of user or other agency information, we will be working with law enforcement, including the New York State Police and the Office of the Attorney General, as well as the Department of State’s Consumer Protection Division, to further investigate this incident and meet all legal obligations triggered when a system breach occurs,” stated JCOPE.</p> <p>The Commission said that it is in the process of notifying the regulated lobbying community and financial disclosure statement filers of the security incident and its impact.</p> <p>Extensions will be automatically granted for any filings due at the time of the attack and could not be submitted because of the outage. JCOPE said the period of those extensions would be determined once the systems have been brought back online.</p> <p>“Our first and highest priority is the safety and integrity of the data entrusted to the Commission by the regulated community,” stated JCOPE executive director Sanford Berland.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Expeditors working to recover from attack
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/freight-operator-expeditors-still-working-to-recover-from-cyberattack-11646354889?mod=hp_minor_pos14
GIST	<p>Expeditors International of Washington Inc., one of the world’s largest logistics operators, told federal regulators it won’t file its annual financial report on time as the company tries to restore all its global systems more than a week after a cyberattack shut down much of its network.</p> <p>Seattle-based Expeditors expects the fallout from the attack will have a “material adverse impact” on its finances as it continues to repair information systems and restore services to freight customers, the company said in a separate filing Wednesday to the Securities and Exchange Commission.</p> <p>The company, the world’s sixth-largest freight forwarder by revenue, according to research group Armstrong & Associates Inc., told customers on Feb. 20 that it had been hit by a targeted cyberattack and said that it had shut down most of its operating systems.</p> <p>Expeditors said in a customer advisory on Monday that it was “now handling shipments and providing services across most products and expanding recovery across our locations.”</p> <p>The company didn’t respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>Expeditors, which reported \$16.5 billion in 2021 revenue, operates more than 350 locations in over 100 countries, offering air and ocean freight-forwarding services and customs brokerage as part of its logistics operations.</p> <p>Additionally, Expeditors asked federal maritime regulators to exempt it from requirements to publish ocean freight rates for 90 days to “allow time for it to cope with the consequences” of the attack, which barred it from accessing and updating the rates, according to a March 2 notice.</p> <p>Numerous cyberattacks have roiled the operations of the logistics industry in recent years. The global NotPetya ransomware attack in 2017 sent container shipping giant A.P. Moller-Maersk A/S reeling and cost the company some \$300 million. Another brought down ocean carrier Mediterranean Shipping Co.’s</p>

website for about five days in the spring of 2020 and another prompted French container shipping line CMA CGM SA to [shut down](#) its systems several months later.

The fallout from logistics company hacks includes the challenge of tracking down cargo that's traveled while systems have been down, said Jake Williams, a senior instructor at Bethesda, Md.-based cybersecurity training company SANS Institute who has worked with logistics companies.

"Restoring from a backup, that's just the beginning," he said. "It's almost like having a car accident, and the tow truck arrives and tows it away. That's just the beginning of getting your car back to operation."

Financial services firm [Cowen](#) Inc. on Thursday cut its 2022 earnings estimate for Expeditors to \$7.25 from \$7.55 a share, citing the cyberattack's short- and long-term costs. The firm said in a research report that Expeditors faces a risk that it "loses business it does not get back."

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HEADLINE	03/04 Covid disinformation down; pivot to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/mar/04/bot-holiday-covid-misinformation-ukraine-social-media
GIST	<p>When David Fisman tweets, he often receives a deluge of hate within moments of posting. Fisman, an epidemiologist and physician, has been outspoken about Covid and public health.</p> <p>Even when he tweets something innocuous – once, to test his theory, he wrote the banal statement “kids are remarkable” – he still receives a flood of angry pushback.</p> <p>But in recent days, Fisman noticed an “astounding” trend, he said. He posted about topics like requiring vaccination and improving ventilation to prevent the spread of Covid – and the nasty responses never came. No support for the trucker convoy, no calls to try the Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, for treason.</p> <p>Others have observed the same phenomenon; those who frequently encounter bots or angry responses are now seeing a significant drop-off. Covid misinformation, which has often trended on social media over the past two years, seems to be taking a nosedive.</p> <p>The reasons for this “bot holiday”, as Fisman calls it, are probably varied – but many of them point to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Russia’s information war with western nations seems to be pivoting to new fronts, from vaccines to geopolitics.</p> <p>And while social media has proven a powerful tool for Ukraine – with images of Zelenskiy striding through the streets of Kyiv and tractors pulling abandoned Russian tanks – growing campaigns of misinformation around the world could change the conflict’s narrative, and the ways the world reacts.</p> <p>The likely reasons for the shift in online chatter are many. Russia began limiting access to Twitter on Saturday, sanctions have been levied against those who could be financing disinformation sites and bot farms, and social media companies are more attuned to banning bots and accounts spreading misinformation during the conflict.</p> <p>But something more coordinated may also be at play.</p> <p>Conspiracy theories around the so-called “New World Order” – loosely defined conspiracies about shadowy global elites that run the world – have converged narrowly on Ukraine, according to emerging research.</p> <p>“There’s actually been a doubling of New World Order conspiracies on Twitter since the invasion,” said Joel Finkelstein, the chief science officer and co-founder of the National Contagion Research Institute, which maps online campaigns around public health, economic issues and geopolitics.</p>

At the same time, “whereas before the topics were very diverse – it was Ukraine and Canada and the virus and the global economy – now the entire conversation is about Ukraine,” he said. “We’re seeing a seismic shift in the disinformation sphere towards Ukraine entirely.”

Online activity has surged overall by 20% since the invasion, and new hashtags have cropped up around Ukraine that seem to be coordinated with bot-like activity, Finkelstein said. Users pushing new campaigns frequently tweet hundreds of times a day and can catch the eye of prominent [authentic accounts](#).

“We can’t say for certain that Russia is behind this or that it contributes directly to the propagation of these messages. But it’s pretty difficult to believe that it’s not involved,” Finkelstein said, with topics strikingly similar to Russian talking points about the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, being controlled by the west and the need to dissolve Nato.

A Russian bot farm reportedly produced 7,000 accounts to post fake information about Ukraine on social media, including Telegram, WhatsApp and Viber, [according](#) to the security service of Ukraine.

And influencers who previously demonstrated against vaccines are now turning their [support](#) to Russia.

Social media users may see a topic trending and not realize its connection to conspiracy theories or disinformation campaigns, said Esther Chan, Australia bureau editor for First Draft, an organization that researches misinformation.

“A lot of social media users may just use these terms because they’re trending, they sound good,” she said. “It’s a very clever sort of astroturfing strategy that we’ve seen in the past few years.”

The topics pushed by [troll farms](#) and Russian state media are often dictated by [Russian officials](#), said Mitchell Orenstein, a professor of Russian and east European studies at University of Pennsylvania and a senior fellow of the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

In this case, it seems “their orders got changed because priorities shifted”, he said.

Russia has coordinated [significant misinformation campaigns](#) to destabilize western countries, including topics like the 2016 election and the pandemic, [according to several reports](#).

Inauthentic accounts are [not fully responsible](#) for real hesitations and beliefs. But they amplify harmful messages and make pushback seem more widespread than it is.

“They’ve had tremendous success with social media platforms,” Orenstein said. “They play a pretty substantial role and they do shift people’s perception about what opinion is.”

Fake accounts will frequently link to “pink slime” or low-credibility sites that once carried false stories about the pandemic and are now shifting focus to Ukraine, said Kathleen Carley, a professor at Carnegie Mellon University.

“The bots themselves don’t create news – they’re more used for amplification,” she said.

These sites frequently sow division on controversial issues, [research](#) finds, and they make it [more difficult](#) to spot disinformation online.

The escalation of narratives like these could have wide-ranging consequences for policy.

“Right now, we’re in the beginning of a war that has a consensus, right? It’s clear that what Russia’s doing is against the moral order of the modern world. But as the war becomes prolonged, and people become exhausted, that may change,” Finkelstein said.

As “we enter into more unknown territory, these narratives will have a chance to grow ... it gives us a window into what these themes are going to be like.”

The research around these changing campaigns is limited, looking at thousands of tweets in the early days of an invasion, Carley cautioned. It’s very early to understand what direction the misinformation is going and who is behind it – and conspiracies tend to follow current events even when there aren’t coordinated campaigns.

And “that does not mean that all the disinformation, all the conspiracy theories about Covid are not still there,” she said. “I would not say the bots are on holiday. They have been re-targeted at different stories now, but they’ll be back.”

Misinformation campaigns around the New World Order can quickly morph depending on the target, giving them more longevity than some other conspiracy theories. “They probably will still exist for a long time,” Chan said. “The question for us is whether they would have an impact on people – on real life and also on policymaking.”

It may be too soon to say what’s emerging during the invasion of Ukraine, but leaders should understand what terms are emerging in conspiracy theories and disinformation campaigns so they don’t inadvertently signal support for the theories in their public statements, she said.

“They need to take note of what terms are commonly used and try to avoid them,” Chan said.

A global agreement on how to address misinformation or disinformation would be key, Carley said.

“Each country does it separately. And the thing is, because we’re all connected very tightly throughout the world in social media, it doesn’t matter that one country has some strong reactions because it’ll still go from another country’s machines on to your machines,” she said.

Such rules would also need to have teeth to prevent further campaigns, she said. And educating the public about how to parse misinformation and disinformation is also important. “We need to start investing better in critical thinking and digital media literacy.”

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HEADLINE	03/03 Surgeon Gen. demands info from big tech
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/03/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#surgeon-general-covid-misinformation
GIST	<p>President Biden’s surgeon general on Thursday formally requested that the major tech platforms submit information about the scale of Covid-19 misinformation on social networks, search engines, crowdsourced platforms, e-commerce platforms and instant messaging systems.</p> <p>A request for information from the surgeon general’s office demanded that tech platforms send data and analysis on the prevalence of Covid-19 misinformation on their sites, starting with common examples of vaccine misinformation documented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>The notice asks the companies to submit “exactly how many users saw or may have been exposed to instances of Covid-19 misinformation,” as well as aggregate data on demographics that may have been disproportionately exposed to or affected by the misinformation.</p> <p>The surgeon general, Dr. Vivek Murthy, also demanded information from the platforms about the major sources of Covid-19 misinformation, including those that engaged in the sale of unproven Covid-19 products, services and treatments.</p>

“Technology companies now have the opportunity to be open and transparent with the American people about the misinformation on their platforms,” Dr. Murthy said in an emailed statement. He added: “This is about protecting the nation’s health.”

Companies have until May 2 to submit the data. Denying requests for information does not carry a penalty, but the notice is the first formal request from the Biden administration of the tech companies to submit Covid-19 misinformation data, according to the surgeon general’s office.

Six months ago, Dr. Murthy [used his first formal advisory to the United States](#) to deliver a broadside against tech and social media companies, which he accused of not doing enough to stop the spread of dangerous health misinformation — especially about Covid-19. He called the misinformation “an urgent threat to public health.”

The request for information is part of President Biden’s [Covid National Preparedness Plan](#), which the White House detailed on Wednesday and which is a road map for a new stage of the pandemic where Covid-19 causes “minimal disruption,” according to the White House. Mr. Biden first revealed details of the plan during his State of the Union address Tuesday night.

In addition to demanding misinformation data from the tech platforms, the surgeon general called on health care providers and the public to submit information about how Covid-19 misinformation has negatively influenced patients and communities.

“We’re asking anyone with relevant insights — from original research and data sets to personal stories that speak to the role of misinformation in public health — to share them with us,” Dr. Murthy said.

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	03/04 Suspected terrorist ordered released in US
SOURCE	https://thefederalist.com/2022/03/04/the-biden-admin-released-a-suspected-terrorist-into-the-united-states-after-he-illegally-crossed-the-border/
GIST	<p>AUSTIN, Texas –On Feb. 16, Republican Congress members asked House Democrats for permission to hold a hearing about a decision to release a suspected Islamist terrorist who in November swam the Rio Grande into Texas.</p> <p>Rep. Andy Biggs, R-Ariz., ranking member of the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security, penned the request to subcommittee Chair Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Texas, in part on grounds that “There is no known case in which a foreign national who pinged on a terror watch list was simply released on his own recognizance. The facts in the case strongly suggest that the Biden Administration failed to follow appropriate protocols with respect to suspected terrorists.”</p> <p>Eight GOP lawmakers on the subcommittee signed the letter. But it appears House Democrats are not as interested. An aide in the congressman’s office said they’ve heard nothing: “They’re ignoring us.” Two of my own emailed requests to Lee’s spokesperson went unanswered.</p> <p>The silent treatment should come as no surprise in this era of sharp partisanship. The GOP co-signatories probably understood this when they sent the letter. But they had to send it anyway because the case at the root of this partisan kerfuffle is too serious for stupid swordsmanship. This one deserves a real hearing, perhaps an inspector general investigation, and media inquiry as the objectively non-partisan homeland security matter this is.</p> <p>The case of Lebanon-born Venezuelan Issam Bazzi’s release into the American interior is just the latest such incident that raises serious questions. Chief among them is whether the historic mass-migration crisis at the U.S. southern border has seriously degraded national security.</p>

How This Terrorist Suspect Was Set Free

Bazzi was among a swell of Venezuelans who began crossing the Rio Grande in escalating numbers last November on word that the United States was handing out free passes into the interior. Some 25,000 turned themselves in at the border in December and another 22,000 did in January. According to leaked Department of Homeland Security documents in my possession, Bazzi flew with his wife and daughter to Monterrey, Mexico, in early November, then swam the river into Brownsville, Texas.

His name and fingerprints flagged him as on the FBI's terrorism watch list, so a mistaken identity is unlikely. In the lexicon of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Bazzi is described in the documents as a "Category 5 group member," [which can mean](#) not considered armed and dangerous. But one of the government documents noted Bazzi's file "contains substantive high side derogatory information."

As I explain in my book, "[America's Covert Border War](#)," danger level is irrelevant for what is supposed to happen with any border-crossing terrorist group member on the FBI's watch list. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services [website notes](#) that "generally, any individual who is a member of a 'terrorist organization' ... is 'inadmissible and is ineligible for most immigration benefits.'"

FBI agents operating in line with established post-9/11 protocols interrogate watch-listed migrants and others from countries of national security interest who cross the southern border and end up in Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention centers. That happened when Bazzi was flagged as a suspected terrorist in Brownsville, Texas, after his crossing. But then the process went off the rails.

After interviewing Bazzi, the FBI cited "highly derogatory information" in deciding he was a flight risk and recommended ICE keep the 50-year-old Venezuelan in custody. Typically, migrants suspected of terrorism are deported to their home countries, even if they have no "highly derogatory" intelligence information on their records and don't pose a flight risk, as the FBI said of Bazzi.

Granted, the United States could not have deported Bazzi to Venezuela because of American diplomatic estrangement with the Nicolas Madura regime. But DHS would have known that the Biden administration was working on an agreement with Colombia to air-deport Venezuelan border-jumpers there. Starting January 31, the United States [began deporting Venezuelans](#) to Colombia under that agreement.

But Bazzi was not in custody for that to happen. Something so far off the grid as to defy belief happened instead. ICE headquarters in Washington D.C. ordered Bazzi released into the United States on his own recognizance to pursue an asylum claim in Michigan, where he had family, according to the DHS documents.

This order came in defiance of the FBI's recommendation. The reason? Bazzi was claimed to be at heightened risk from Covid-19 in the detention center due to a "Chronic Care Condition – Overweight," the leaked DHS documents said.

Someone in federal homeland security leaked sensitive internal documents about this to Pulitzer Prize-winning former New York Times reporter Charlie LeDuff, [who ran a story in a Detroit-area online publication](#) that no other reporter has even tried to follow. LeDuff told me he made contact with Bazzi and relatives who, in brief telephone communications, denied he was a terrorist and said they had no idea why he was on a terrorism watch list.

Even Deeper Causes for Concern

According to the documents, U.S. authorities had denied Bazzi a tourist visa in 2019 to visit relatives in the Detroit area. His FBI terrorism watch list status was cited for declining him. Those systems worked in keeping him out of the country.

All thinking Americans on either side of the political aisle should find unity in asking why Bazzi's illegal crossing of the southern border and merely asking for asylum got him inside the country. The obvious initial indicator, short of more answers, is that a border defense failed in an important national security

function, most probably because a mass migration crisis of historic proportions. An overloading 2 million apprehensions during 2021, the most since the nation began counting in 1960, has broken management systems down there.

Instead of the outcome for Bazzi's tourist visa application, Bazzi's illegal border crossing has him living free on his own recognizance pending the outcome of an asylum case that, also because of the border, will allow him total freedom for years because [of a vastly expanded immigration court backlog](#).

Mexico Also Released a Yemeni Terror Suspect

One reason to suspect the mass migration crisis has heightened a once fairly managed national security threat is that the Bazzi case is now the second one I have found where border counterterrorism protocols apparently broke under the weight. Mexico is staggering under the mass migration on its side too.

According to other government documents leaked to me, Mexican immigration in April 2021 caught a Yemeni just as he was about to cross into Del Rio, Texas. At that early stage of the mass migration crisis, collaborative protocols with the Americans, as I also report in "[America's Covert Border War](#)," seemed to be working. Notified, the Americans would have run the name and fingerprints through databases and gotten the FBI watch list hit; Yemeni national Ahmed Mohammed Ahmed was a "Category 5" member of a terrorist organization.

The Mexicans tried to deport Ahmed to Yemen. It didn't work out. An American law enforcement intelligence source told me the Mexican intelligence officers prematurely left him at a European transit airport and returned to Mexico. Ahmed abandoned his connecting flight and returned to Mexico, too. The Mexicans caught him again in July 2021, preparing to cross into Del Rio.

By then, Mexico was struggling to manage historic numbers of migrants. They kept him for five months. But instead of deporting him this time, Mexico let Ahmed go free, an act the Americans would never have previously agreed to.

Ahmed was supposed to check in weekly with immigration once a week but, of course, disappeared. The release so alarmed the Americans that they sent out a "Be On The Lookout" bulletin to law enforcement on the Texas side to capture him. It's unclear if anyone ever did.

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HEADLINE	03/04 Australia lists Hamas as a terrorist group
SOURCE	https://www.ipost.com/international/islamic-terrorism/article-699332
GIST	<p>Australia on Friday listed the entire Palestinian Islamist group Hamas as a terrorist organization, calling the move a deterrent to political and religious violence and bringing Australia in line with the United States, the European Union and Britain.</p> <p>Australia had for two decades proscribed Hamas's paramilitary wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, as a terrorist organization but flagged last month that it wanted to upgrade the listing to the whole organization, a process that involved consulting Australia's state and territory leaders.</p> <p>The change puts Australia into lockstep with its allies, which have also been moving to tighten their opposition to the Gaza ruling body, citing its access to sophisticated weaponry and terrorist training facilities.</p> <p>Fleeing Russia's invasion, Ukraine's Jewish refugees look to the future</p> <p>"The hateful ideologies of terrorist groups and those who support them have no place in Australia," Home Affairs Minister Karen Andrews said in a statement.</p> <p>"Our strong laws target not only terrorist acts and terrorists, but also the organizations that plan, finance and carry out these abhorrent acts," she added.</p>

	<p>Listing organizations was a deterrent to violent extremism and sent a message that Australia condemned the use of violence to achieve political, religious or ideological aims, she added.</p> <p>Proscribing an organization in Australia makes it illegal to give it funds, support or services.</p> <p>Hamas has political and military wings, both now designated. It has ruled the Gaza Strip since a civil war in 2007 when it expelled forces loyal to Western-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Abbas remains dominant in Palestinian self-ruled areas of the Israeli-occupied West Bank.</p> <p>Australia has been building its list of designated terrorist groups, which now number 28. It recently listed three other groups: Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, which are based in Syria, and the Nationalist Socialist Order, a group based in the United States.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Covid impact extremists groups use of IEDs
SOURCE	https://reliefweb.int/report/world/covid-19-and-its-impact-extremist-groups-use-ieds
GIST	<p>The global Covid-19 pandemic, now entering its third year, has wreaked havoc on the safety, health and well-being of societies and communities worldwide. As of 1 March, 2022, there have been 435,626,514 confirmed cases and 5,952,215 deaths^[1] as reported by the World Health Organization. Beyond the daily lives of many being altered due to this crisis, global socio-economic, geopolitical, and conflict landscapes have been impacted. Resources and political attention have been refocused on public health, distracting from counterterrorism efforts allowing terrorist groups in many countries to carry on as normal. As Miles Comerford from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue notes: "In contexts where terrorism is largely an urban phenomenon there has been a notable reduction in violence to coincide with global lockdown. However, in settings where terrorism is occurring in the context of a broader conflict-including in disputed or border regions- Covid-19 seems to have had relatively little impact on the trajectory of violence."^[2]</p> <p>The pandemic has allowed terrorist recruiters and extremists to exploit financial, health and personal concerns opportunistically to advance their own movement and ideology all while using propaganda to reinforce power and influence, and fuel division to further a loss of trust in governance and state authority. Violent extremists have continued to utilize low-tech, low-cost tactics such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs), shooting attacks and vehicle ramming that often defy detection and disruption.^[3]</p> <p>For the purpose of this article, AOA V has concentrated on four areas of conflict- Iraq, Syria, Somalia and Afghanistan- and the extremist groups that operate there: ISIS, Al Qaeda and the Taliban. By analysing discourse from these groups during the pandemic, as well as the AOA V's own database on global IED attacks, we sought to discover if dialogue and strategy impacted tactics, specifically IED usage, and capability during the Covid-19 pandemic. AOA V's data is gleaned from English language media reports and does not profess to capture ever single incident. Especially in an age of pandemic, reporting of explosive violence may well have been under-powered and neglected.</p> <p>The Islamic State (Iraq and Syria)</p> <p>Covid-19 introduced yet another threat to the already battered and fragile political orders in Iraq and Syria, putting further strain on the failing health care systems there. The Wilson Centre (2020) reported that the Islamic State blamed Shiites for the first cases of coronavirus in Iraq and called the outbreak a "sign" that Shiites should "abandon polytheism".^[4] Subsequent statements from their al Naba newsletter called the disease a "painful torment" for all "Crusader nations" in the West. While followers were warned not to travel to Europe, they were urged to protect themselves through physical precautions and prayer and to capitalize on the paralysis of Western governments and their militaries.^[5] The group also stated that followers should free ISIS prisoners being held in camps in Iraq and Syria.</p> <p>While ISIS is nothing close to its former capability, according to the UN counter-terrorism chief, it has shown over the Covid pandemic that it "continues to exploit the disruption, grievances and development setbacks caused by the pandemic to regroup, recruit new followers and intensify its activities- both online and on the ground."^[6] Present proxy militias, civil unrest due to high unemployment, ethno-religious</p>

grievances, a lack of government trust and vulnerable borders in Iraq and a civil war in Syria, that is about to enter its eleventh year, has aided this re-establishment.

IED Attacks in Iraq 2019-2021

There were 447 recorded IED attacks in Iraq from 2019-2021. The number of IED attacks has been on the rise over the past year with a total of 187 attacks in 2021. ISIS was the known perpetrator in 36 of these attacks, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) for 4 while the remaining attacks have unknown perpetrators. This accounts for a 60% increase from 2020's 117 IED attacks. ISIS claimed responsibility for 28 of the 2020 IED attacks, the PKK 2 and the remaining attacks had unknown perpetrators.

Interestingly, 2020 had the lowest number of IED attacks for the three year period, mainly attributed to a decline in attacks during the first half of 2020, when the Covid pandemic began. There was a 20% decrease in the number of attacks from 2019 (143) to 2020 (117). ISIS also claimed responsibility for the highest number of attacks during 2019 with a total of 62. The PKK claimed 2 and the remaining 79 had unknown perpetrators. The IED attacks over the three year period focused mainly on soft targets- roads, urban residences, villages, agricultural land, places of worship or markets. Out of the total three years only 17 attacks were carried out on hard targets- police stations (2) or military bases (15). In the three year period 25 IED were car bombs, 140 were road side, 1 used multiple explosive weapons with the remaining non-specific IEDs.

IED Attacks in Syria 2019-2021

There were 827 recorded IED attacks in Syria from 2019-2021. IED related attacks yearly averages declined by 40% from 2019 to 2021. This was mainly attributed to a marked decline in IED attacks in Syria for the second half of 2021. In 2019 there were 338 total IED attacks of which 98 were attributed to ISIS. In 2020, there were 286 total IED attacks, with 36 linked to ISIS. 2021 had a total of 203 IED attacks, with ISIS linked to 49 of them. Over the three year period, ISIS was linked to a total of 183 IED attacks, Syrian Rebel groups were the known perpetrator for 4 of the attacks, Turkish backed groups 3, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and YPG both accounted for one each and the remaining IED attacks were by unknown perpetrators.

Landmines accounted for almost 10% of the attacks in 2019 and 2020 and 15% of the attacks in 2021. 18 of the attacks for the three year period were suicide attacks. 159 of the attacks were victim-activated, this accounted for 20% of all IED attacks for the three year period. Soft targets were again with roads, markets, villages and urban residences accounting for a large number of the attacks. 135 of the IED attacks were car bombs, 60 were road side IED's, 2 were multi-explosive IED's and the remaining attacks were non-specific.

Al Qaeda and Affiliates

In recent years, officials have characterized the Al Qaeda (AQ) threat as stemming mainly from its affiliates. In March 2020, an AQ affiliate group issued a declaration on the Media Network Al-Thurur, rejecting a cease fire and instead calling for an intensified battle against a crippled West.^[7] Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) in Syria instructed its followers not to let the virus distract them from their fight against Shiites and other non-believers. In its Iba' newsletter they stated that the virus had been sent by God to kill disbelievers.^[8] Markets, public spaces, schools and mosques were closed down and HTS instructed people to keep their distance from others. Al Shabaab "claimed that the virus had been deliberately spread in Somalia "by crusader forces".^[9] Further to this, AQ, HTS and A-Shabaab "have used official propaganda channels to emphasize their governance and state-building credentials, and to present the effectiveness of their respective 'Ministries of Health' within their pseudo-states."^[10]

IED Attacks in Somalia

Al-Shabaab is the largest, wealthiest, and most violent AQ associated group in the world, according to the US Department of Defence. For the past three years, Al Shabaab has been responsible for half of all IED attacks in Somalia. Out of the 201 three-year total of IED attacks from 2019-2021, Al-Shabaab was the perpetrator for 100 of them. Soft targets accounted for 90% of all IED attacks. 39% of the IED's were used in roadside attacks, 23% were used as car bombs and the remaining were non-specific IED attacks. 14 IED

attacks over the three year period were by remote detonation, 54 were suicide attacks, 24 were victim activated, and the remaining had an unclear activation method.

The Taliban

The Taliban's response to Covid-19 has been in stark contrast to other extremist groups. They have been eager to profess their readiness and aptitude for handling the crisis, hoping to reinforce their political legitimacy and social status. While efforts and co-operation with the Afghan government have varied district to district and are often described as propaganda, their public health awareness campaign during the Covid pandemic has been welcomed. Social media pages connected with the group have shown Taliban members in white gowns and gloves distributing soap and educating on proper hand hygiene.^[11]

Militants announced Afghans returning from Iran would be forced to quarantine. Cease-fires were offered in areas of outbreak. Remarkably, they began to cooperate with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Red Cross. This unexpected response may have resulted from many top members of the Taliban contracting the virus^[12], leaving leadership roles vacant affecting security and financial operations. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan has renewed concerns that it will become a safe haven for a plethora of terrorist and extremist groups and many of these efforts aided by government and NGO health workers will be discontinued. While the U.N. reported the plummeting of covid testing and vaccinations in the weeks after the Taliban seized power,^[13] a recent January 2022 video of the Taliban's acting Minister of Public Health, Qalandar Ebad urging the people in Afghanistan to get vaccinated, gives hope.^[14]

IED Attacks in Afghanistan

There were a total of 1,072 recorded IED attacks in Afghanistan during the period of 2019-2021. Despite Covid, IED attacks rose 54% from 2019's total of 307 IED attacks to 2020's total of 472, which was also the height of IED attacks for the three year period. 2021 saw a massive drop off in the second half of the year (July-December 2021) with only 47 recorded IED attacks, compared to 304 for the same period of time during the previous year.

As the lowest number of attacks have occurred most recently (August 2021 and onwards), it is likely correlated to the Taliban takeover. Out of the 307 total IED attacks for 2019, the Taliban were the perpetrators for 95, ISIS Afghanistan for 11, and the remaining had unknown perpetrators. In 2020, the Taliban was responsible for 80 IED attacks, ISIS Afghanistan 6, out of the 472 total attacks for the year. 2021 had a total of 293 IED attacks for the year with the Taliban responsible for 31 and ISIS Afghanistan responsible for 15. Soft targets- roads, urban residents, villages, and markets were the most common targets. Only 8% of all attacks were on hard targets. 54% (582) of all attacks used road side bombs, 12% (129) used car bombs, 0.1% were multi-explosive IED's and the remaining 34% (360) were non-specific IED's.

Conclusion

Extremist groups have used the instability that the Covid pandemic has presented to their distinct advantage. Dialogue has reinforced ideological beliefs and has been used as a tool to further strengthen strategy and to gain legitimacy. IED attacks and tactics used over this period have remained fairly consistent over the past three years, exhibiting extremist organisations' ability to maintain their operational capacity.

The last six months of 2021 have provided the lowest IED attack totals during the three year period for Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia. Only in Iraq has the most recent six month total for IED attacks been at its highest level for the three year period.

Looking ahead, similar trends have already been seen from the AOAV database from January 2022 with IED attacks levels, tactics and targets in all four countries remaining consistent with end of year 2021 levels. As 2022 progresses, extremist groups look likely to continue to embrace unpredictable, smaller-scale IED attacks, while continuing to expand their growth and increase their operational capabilities.

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SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/04/pakistan-mosque-blast/
GIST	<p>PESHAWAR, Pakistan — At least 30 people were killed and 50 wounded in an attack on a Shiite mosque in Pakistan’s northwestern city of Peshawar, according a local hospital spokesman, Muhammad Asim.</p> <p>A blast struck the mosque during Friday prayers, and gunmen pushed inside, opening fire on worshippers packed into the main hall. No group immediately claimed responsibility.</p> <p>Pakistani police tweeted that at least two assailants carried out the attack, first firing on police officers guarding the mosque in central Peshawar. The tweet said one officer was killed and a second was critically wounded.</p> <p>Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan condemned the attack. His office said in a statement that he “ordered immediate medical treatment to the injured and asked for a report of the incident.”</p> <p>Video released by police showed victims being loaded into ambulances as additional security forces arrived at the scene.</p> <p>Militant attacks have increased in Pakistan along border regions with Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover of Kabul last year. Some leaders of extremist groups long active in Pakistan have said the Taliban’s rise next door has emboldened their forces.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Court blocks CIA psychologists testifying
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/law/2022/mar/03/supreme-court-cia-enhanced-interrogation-block-testifying
GIST	<p>Two psychologists who devised the CIA’s post-9/11 system of US “enhanced interrogation”, which has been widely denounced as torture, cannot be called to testify in a case in Poland brought by a terrorism suspect subjected to the abuses, the supreme court has ruled.</p> <p>In a 6-3 ruling on Thursday, the court allowed the US government to block the psychologists from giving evidence in a case brought by Abu Zubaydah, a Guantánamo prisoner who was arrested in 2002 and has been held without charge ever since. The majority of the justices granted the government the privilege of “state secrets” – a power that prevents the public disclosure of information deemed harmful to national security.</p> <p>Zubaydah had wanted to call the psychologists, James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen, to confirm that he had been unlawfully detained and tortured in a so-called CIA “black site” in Stare Kiejkuty, Poland. It is public knowledge that the prisoner was tortured in a number of black sites in several countries between 2002 and his transfer to Guantánamo four years later.</p> <p>Among the many harrowing torture techniques that were applied against him, he was waterboarded – a form of controlled drowning – 83 times.</p> <p>In Thursday’s ruling, the nine justices of the supreme court divided along unusual lines that crossed the traditional conservative-liberal divide. The majority opinion was written by Stephen Breyer, the court’s senior liberal justice who is retiring at the end of this term.</p> <p>In his opinion, Breyer argued that the government was entitled to assert the “state secrets” privilege even though the critical information in question – in this case the location of a CIA black site in Poland – was already publicly known. Breyer agreed with the CIA that “clandestine” relations between the US and foreign intelligence services were based on trust and had to be protected in the interests of national security.</p> <p>Two justices dissented from the opinion – the liberal justice Sonia Sotomayor and conservative Neil Gorsuch. In a lengthy rebuttal, Gorsuch pointed out that the torture to which Zubaydah was subjected had been extensively chronicled in official reports, books and movies.</p>

“Ending this suit may shield the government from some further modest measure of embarrassment. But respectfully, we should not pretend it will safeguard any secret,” he wrote.

Elena Kagan, the court’s third liberal justice, stood apart from the majority opinion, arguing that the case should have been allowed to proceed in a lower court.

Mark Denbeaux, a lead lawyer for Zubaydah, said that the court’s ruling would have a detrimental impact on public accountability. “More truth can’t come out. Whatever the psychologists would have said can’t come out. It’s just endless secrets.”

Denbeaux added that the evocation of the state secrets privilege was entirely in line with the past 20 years in which the CIA had relentlessly labored to keep the details of the torture program from being revealed. “Even before they started to torture him the CIA demanded that if he died he would be cremated immediately and if he did not die he would be held incommunicado forever. And they have got what they wanted.”

Though the Zubaydah case ultimately failed to dent the wall of secrecy that has been erected around the CIA’s torture program, it was remarkable in one other regard. When the supreme court heard arguments in the case in October, several of the justices [openly referred](#) to the prisoner’s interrogation as a form of torture.

Amy Coney Barrett, one of the conservative justices appointed to the court by Donald Trump, talked about “the evidence of how he was treated and his torture”. It was the first time that the nation’s highest court had used the “torture” word with regard to Guantánamo detainees and their treatment in the wake of the terrorist attacks on 9/11.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	03/04 Flight diverted; 3 unruly passengers
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/aeromexico-flight-diverted-unruly-passengers/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN) — An AeroMéxico flight from Toronto to Mexico City was diverted to Houston early Thursday morning to remove three passengers who appeared to be intoxicated.</p> <p>AeroMéxico Flight 617 landed at George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston at 3:42 a.m., according to flight tracking site FlightAware.</p> <p>The passengers, two men and a woman, were told they weren't allowed to consume alcohol by a flight attendant, according to an account of the incident from the Houston Police Department, and were advised to finish their beverages.</p> <p>"But following that incident, all three individuals kept refusing to cover their faces with their masks, were rude, confrontational and appeared to be intoxicated," according to police department spokesman Kese Smith.</p> <p>The flight attendant alerted the captain, who diverted the plane to Houston.</p> <p>Police met the flight, and all three were removed from the aircraft. Two passengers were transported to Houston's Sobering Center, a facility where people can be transported without being arrested to avoid a criminal record for public intoxication.</p>

No charges were filed for either passenger. The third passenger was left in the care of Customs and Border Protection, Smith said, "as apparently he had a no-entry to the US stipulation, so obviously we can't take him to the Sobering Center as that would be entering the United States."

CNN Travel has reached out to CBP for details.

Augusto Bernal, a spokesperson for Houston Airport System, confirmed that "Houston Police and CBP met the flight and removed the passengers from the aircraft. The flight departed shortly after to Mexico City," Bernal said via email.

AeroMéxico did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

A big problem in the United States

Unruly passenger behavior reached record highs in the United States last year, with nearly 6,000 reports of unruly behavior logged by the Federal Aviation Administration. So far this year, the FAA has logged 712 reports.

The agency said in mid-February that 80 of the disruptive incidents on aircraft since the start of last year have been referred to the Justice Department to consider criminal prosecution.

In February, an American Airlines flight attendant [hit an unruly passenger in the head with a coffee pot](#) as he tried to open the plane's exit door and the flight was diverted. The FBI was involved in that case and the passenger was charged with one count of assaulting and intimidating a flight attendant.

The FAA does not have authority to prosecute criminal cases, but it can propose fines of up to \$37,000 per violation for unruly behavior.

In November, the FAA proposed \$161,823 in civil penalties against eight passengers for for alleged incidents of unruly behavior involving alcohol.

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HEADLINE	03/03 Ship carrying \$800M rare cars sinks
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/800m-worth-of-rare-cars-sink-aboard-cargo-ship-philanthropists-bentley-among-them-ernie-boch-jr-norwood-massachusetts-rhode-island-atlantic-ocean-felicity-ace-boch-enterprises-united-states-asia-europe-portugal-germany
GIST	<p>NORWOOD, Mass. (WJAR) — Philanthropist and businessman Ernie Boch Jr. was looking forward to finally adding his 12-cylinder Bentley to an impressive collection of cars at his Massachusetts home.</p> <p>But now, that car sits at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.</p> <p>Boch's Bentley was one of 1,500 rare cars on board the Felicity Ace when it sank Tuesday. It's not exactly clear how many cars were on the ship when it went down, but vessels the size of Felicity Ace can carry at least 4,000 vehicles.</p> <p>The large cargo vessel went down 250 miles off Portugal's Azores Islands. The ship was on its way to Rhode Island from Germany when a fire broke out 13 days prior to its fiery demise.</p> <p>"I've never seen anything like this," Boch told WJAR. "What sunk with that ship were extremely rare vehicles. There's \$800 million worth of cars on the ocean [floor]."</p> <p>Beyond the Bentley were 12-cylinder Lamborghinis — a rare, exotic car Boch said might never see the road again.</p> <p>"That's it, it's over," he said. "Those were the last ones."</p>

	<p>The ship's sinking comes as the auto industry deals with supply chain issues that have made it hard for many Americans to find vehicles.</p> <p>"Any car loss is tough for the public," emphasized Boch. "You can't get vehicles now. That was a great shipment of vehicles, almost all of them were sold. And with the industry the way it is now, everything is short, so it's just tough."</p> <p>Boch, who owns multiple car dealerships in Massachusetts, expressed his concerns for a potential "ship shortage," and thinks that could create more issues for car owners in the United States.</p> <p>"The cars coming from Asia and Europe will be built ready to go and there won't be enough ships to bring them over," he explained. "I believe that is going to be the next problem."</p> <p>Boch told WJAR his Bentley has been re-ordered and car manufacturers are working with other affected customers.</p> <p>"The people who had lost vehicles, except Lamborghinis, are getting their new vehicle put at the front of the line so they can get them quicker."</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 UN report: dire picture Gulf of Mexico future
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/report-paints-dire-picture-gulf-mexicos-future-83231057
GIST	<p>NEW ORLEANS -- Hurricane Harvey dumped more than 50 inches of rain on parts of the Texas coast in 2017. Then in 2020, ferocious winds from Hurricane Laura destroyed homes across coastal Louisiana. Hurricane Ida hit in 2021, leaving the entire city of New Orleans without power for days.</p> <p>Such extreme weather is becoming more common, and that's just one of the warnings for the Gulf of Mexico region in a United Nations report released this week. The devastating effects of climate change in the region also include rising seas, collapsing fisheries and toxic tides, even if humanity somehow manages to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial era.</p> <p>"The hurricanes that we get, there's a higher probability that they can bloom up into major hurricanes," Louisiana's state climatologist Barry Keim said, agreeing with the report's details on more dangerous weather.</p> <p>The report, an "atlas of human suffering," details numerous ways in which climate change will affect the gulf. From Texas to Florida, which has the longest coastline of any state, the entire U.S. Gulf coast is under serious threat from rising seas as the planet's polar ice caps melt, the U.N. report says.</p> <p>The region, home to major oil and gas production in Texas and Louisiana and tourist destinations in Mississippi, Alabama and Florida, tends to be conservative politically, and its mostly Republican leaders have stressed adaption to climate change — higher roads, sea walls, preventing saltwater intrusion — more than broad efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or promote cleaner energy.</p> <p>For example, the Republican-led Florida House of Representatives refused on Tuesday to add clean-energy measures to a plan to bolster the state against sea level rise and flooding. The bill's sponsor, GOP Rep. Demi Busatta Cabrera of the Miami area, said her aim is to do "what we can fix today."</p> <p>Democratic Rep. Ben Diamond, who is running for a St. Petersburg-area congressional seat, was disappointed lawmakers didn't do more.</p> <p>Improved climate change resiliency is good, he said, but "then there's also stopping the causes of those problems in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, in terms of reducing our carbon emissions." The Florida House bill does not get into that.</p>

People considering 30-year mortgages are already looking for homes and commercial buildings that pose lower flood risks. One study cited by the U.N. says the trend is evident in Florida's Miami-Dade County, where some buyers are shying away from expensive waterfront homes.

In Miami Beach, streets already flood on sunny days, especially during the so-called King Tides, and the report says the Tampa Bay area, surrounded by shallow seas, and is considered one of the most vulnerable places in the nation for storm surges.

Sea level rise poses an existential threat to much of Louisiana, because so much of the Mississippi River delta has been sinking due to human interventions. The loss of sediment from leveeing the river and saltwater intrusion caused by coastal oil and gas development are two big culprits, Keim noted.

“South Louisiana is probably the most vulnerable place to climate change in the United States,” Keim said.

Other parts of the Gulf face different problems, the report warns. Tourism and fishing industries depend on thriving habitats off the coasts of Florida and the Yucatan Peninsula, but coral reefs are bleaching due to “warming ocean waters interacting with non-climate stressors.” In Florida alone, the decline of the reefs could translate into \$24 billion to \$55 billion in economic losses by 2100, the report said.

The report details efforts in the region to adapt to climate change. Miami-Dade released a strategic sea level rise response plan in 2021 that calls for adapting infrastructure, elevating roads, building on higher ground and expanding waterfront parks and canals.

The city of Miami Beach has already spent more than \$500 million installing pumps to flush water off the island, with no guarantees that this will keep the tourists’ feet dry. The city of Miami is spending potentially billions of dollars to keep the ocean at bay and limit saltwater intrusion into freshwater supplies.

“The most common question I get asked is whether Miami is going to be here in 50 years, whether it’s going to be here in 100 years,” Miami Mayor Francis Suarez said at a recent news conference. “This is the beginning of having a comprehensive plan to answer that question in the affirmative.”

In Louisiana, the state’s Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority has a plan with “very specific projects,” the U.N. report said, such as dredging to replenish wetlands and rebuilding barrier islands damaged by storms.

Alex Kolker, an associate professor of coastal geology at the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium in Cocodrie, noted that on Feb. 1, Louisiana also announced a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.

Outbreaks of red tide, which are natural toxic organisms originally noticed by the Spanish explorers, have become more frequent and more deadly because of warmer air and water, experts say.

The increasing outbreaks kill more fish and sea life and harm the tourist industry with smelly fish-strewn beaches, poor fishing and the possibility of harms to human health, especially among people with asthma or other lung conditions.

From 2017 to 2019, according to a University of Florida study, tourism sectors lost \$184 million in revenue because of red tide. The warmer water also fosters algae blooms, caused by pollution from agricultural, urban and other sources, that are getting worse along Florida's coasts, contributing to the lack of seagrass that has led to a record die-off of manatees in the past year. The state resorted to feeding one group of starving manatees romaine lettuce instead.

“You can’t just go out and plant a bunch of seagrass,” said Tom Reinert, regional director of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

HEADLINE	03/03 Navy recovers sunken stealth F-35 jet
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/navy-recovers-stealth-35-south-china-sea/story?id=83228258
GIST	<p>The U.S. Navy said Thursday it has recovered the stealth F-35C fighter jet that fell into the South China Sea after a crash landing aboard the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson in late January.</p> <p>The jet's resting place in international waters had fueled speculation that China might want to attempt its own salvage operations of the world's most advanced stealth fighter jet.</p> <p>On Jan. 24 while conducting regular flight operations in the South China Sea the jet crashed on the carrier's deck while attempting a landing. It ultimately slid off of the deck into the ocean waters and seven sailors, including the pilot, were injured in the crash.</p> <p>The Navy said shortly after the incident that it would attempt to recover the jet that ultimately was located at a depth of more than two miles.</p> <p>"The wreckage was recovered from a depth of approximately 12,400-feet by a team from CTF 75 and the NAVSEA's Supervisor of Salvage and Diving (SUPSALV) embarked on the diving support construction vessel (DSCV) Picasso," said a statement from the Navy's Seventh Fleet.</p> <p>"The task force's expertise in rapid, scalable command, control, and communications, agile logistics, organic security, and explosive ordnance disposal was the most flexible choice for the fleet commander to respond in a timely manner," said CTF 75 Commodore, Capt. Gareth Healy.</p> <p>The plane was recovered using a remotely operated vehicle, known as the CURV-21, that attached specialized rigging and lift lines to the aircraft so it could be raised by the crane aboard the Picasso.</p> <p>"The aircraft will be delivered to a nearby military installation to aid in the ongoing investigation and evaluated for potential transport to the United States," said the statement.</p> <p>Soon after the crash, a video that showed the aircraft on approach and photos that showed the aircraft floating in the water were posted on social media and confirmed by the Navy as having been taken aboard the aircraft carrier.</p> <p>Five sailors, including a junior officer, were later charged with leaking a second video that showed the actual crash that had been recorded by one of the ship's surveillance cameras.</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	03/04 Inmates leaving gangs for better lives
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/religion-chicago-gangs-76872f04ab5b651fddbd29de108946aa
GIST	<p>WHEATON, Ill. (AP) — Under penalty of a beating or death, Erik Eck pledged at age 13 to adhere to the Latin Kings' first rule: "Once a King, always a King." Tattoos that bedeck his entire body express his fealty forever to one of the largest gangs in the U.S.</p> <p>Now 36, the longtime Latin King enforcer is trying to leave anyway. He is seeking to scrub his past by erasing his gang tattoos through a new gang-cessation and jobs program he and 11 other inmates signed up for at a Chicago-area jail.</p>

The Associated Press got exclusive access over two days to the first 12 inmates enrolled in the largely privately funded program at the DuPage County Jail and to their cellblock. For their safety, they're isolated from the jail's 500 other inmates, half of whom are in gangs.

Eck, jailed on burglary charges, earned the nickname "Hollywood" on the street for his swagger. But nightmares jarred him awake for days before he recently walked into the jail's new tattoo-removal wing.

"This life is all I've ever known," Eck said about agonizing over his decision to deface the tattoos that have been central to his identity for 20 years. "But it's for the better."

He added: "I feel like the change has officially begun."

One goal is to land the inmates jobs in horticulture, welding and other fields they're learning, said the program's civilian director and chief architect, Michael Beary. He said there's booming interest among businesses scrambling to address COVID-19-driven labor shortages.

Jobs training was available previously, but the gang and tattoo emphasis was added this year.

"I used to beg businesses to hire these guys. Now they say, 'As long as they show up for work, we don't care what they did,'" said Beary, a longtime business owner and executive director of the nonprofit JUST of DuPage, founded by a Roman Catholic nun to develop reentry programs for inmates.

The inmates aren't promised jobs or reduced sentences. But if they graduate, they do get help searching for work and relocating away from their gangs. A letter from the sheriff touts their participation.

To graduate, participants must have their gang tattoos removed or covered with other tats. It's proof, said DuPage County Sheriff James Mendrick, they're serious about forsaking their old lives.

"It's a point of no return," he said. "It's a commitment to themselves — and to us, that we aren't wasting our time."

The first tattoo Eck had covered was one on his arm of the Latin Kings' initials. Jail-sanctioned tattooist Tom Begley inked the image of a deer over it in a four-hour session in February. Covering all of Eck's gang tattoos will take months.

A roaring lion — a favorite Latin Kings symbol — was recently converted to a roaring bear. Eck has to be careful to pick animals that aren't other gangs' symbols. A rabbit, he said, is out. It's a symbol of Latin Kings rival Two Six Nation.

Begley and his wife, Meagan Begley, of the suburban Electric Tattoo Parlor, jumped at the chance to lend their skills. Inmates painted a mural on a wall in the jail's three-chaired tattoo studio. It says: "Hope, Purpose and Redemption."

On a previous day, Tom Begley transformed a Satan Disciples tattoo on Jaime Martinez's forearm from a Christian cross fashioned from rifles into the image of a vulture.

Nearby, Meagen Begley removed hand tattoos of 27-year-old Latin Count leader Gilberto Rios, wielding a pen-like tool to scrape off outer skin, then injecting a saline solution. That pushes ink into a scab, which flakes away over several weeks.

"There's lots of crying by them," she said, but not due to the pain. "These tattoos have been their identity. (Giving them up) is very emotional."

One she removed from Rios' hand was a backward "D," a symbol of disdain for Martinez's gang.

The two chatted amiably, comparing tattoo work done on them that day.

"If they saw each other on the street," Beary said, "they'd try and kill each other."

Affluent DuPage County isn't considered a hotbed of gangs. Mendrick, elected sheriff as a Republican, contends violent crime in his county is often committed by gangs from Chicago, in neighboring Cook County.

Mendrick is convinced the program, funded partly by church donations, will help reduce crime.

"I am a religious man," he said. "I feel I am answering my calling." Beary cites religion as a motivation, too.

The program also offers classes on the Bible, anger management and decision-making. And it provides counseling to drug-addicted inmates.

Once freed, Eck wants to own a business. He believes he can apply leadership skills honed in his gang.

He's blunt about the perks of gang life.

"Being a gang member in my neighborhood was better than being the president of the United States," he said. "I wanted the cars, the women ... the power, the respect."

The killing of his best friend two months before Eck was jailed a year ago began changing his perspective. It was an internal hit by a Latin King who coveted his friend's higher perch in the gang hierarchy, Eck said.

"He took 16 bullets, four in the face. It was like, enough is enough," said Eck, adding that guilt at having hurt others also began weighing on him.

Other participants also cited trauma from years of gang violence as motivation for wanting out. Chicago police say most of the nearly 800 homicides in the city last year, the most in a quarter century, were gang-related.

In another tattoo session, Tom Begley traced a new image over a scar on Martinez's chest from when he was shot last year at a stoplight.

The tattoo is of a clock set to 6:20, memorializing the date his father died of a heroin overdose on June 20, 2016. Martinez turns quiet when he mentions his dad.

The 21-year-old knows he's putting himself in peril by spurning his gang.

"I don't want to be doing this 50 years from now. ... I know a lot of (adults) still in this life. And it's just eating them up," he said.

Eck credits Beary, whom he describes as a father figure, for persuading him to join the program.

"I have never had anyone come up to me and say there's another way to live," he said.

Eck wants to create a meaningful life. One more criminal conviction, he said, could send him to prison for life.

There are already signs of his transformation.

Speaking on a recent afternoon, he appeared startled when he realized what pronoun he was using to talk about the Latin Kings.

	<p>“I’m saying ‘they’ not ‘we,’” he said, looking at Beary sitting nearby and laughing.</p> <p>He has stopped answering to his street name, too. When several inmates recently addressed him by it, he bristled.</p> <p>“My name’s Erik,” he snapped. “Hollywood? ... I don’t know who you’re talking about.”</p> <p>As he struggles to reinvent himself, he says he wants nothing to do with his gang persona.</p> <p>“I want to be able to wake up and not see that person anymore.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/04 Horrors of human trafficking in China
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/dypkvq/chained-woman-human-trafficking-china
GIST	<p>When shocking videos emerged in China of a mother of eight chained by her neck to the wall of a shack, later suspected to be a victim of human trafficking, 56-year-old Zhang Xiuhong felt torn between two possibilities.</p> <p>Zhang, whose teenage daughter went missing after leaving home for school 14 years ago, hoped for a moment that the woman in the videos was her long lost girl, Yao Li.</p> <p>“If she was Yao Li, at least I had found her,” Zhang, who lives in the northern Chinese province of Hebei, told VICE World News. But she quickly changed her mind. “I didn’t want to see her living like this. How much pain she must have suffered.”</p> <p>Zhang studied the face of the woman in the videos closely—she had the same square-shaped face as Yao, her only child.</p> <p>But she was not the one. Zhang’s daughter would be 28 years old today. The chained woman is believed to be 44.</p> <p>Like many parents with missing teenage daughters, Zhang suspects Yao had been abducted and sold either as a sex worker or a wife to a rural man away from home. A traditional preference for sons has led to sex-selective abortions and a heavily skewed sex ratio in China. In some rural places, the demand for brides has fueled trafficking businesses, as criminal gangs take women, often from even less developed areas, and sell them to bachelors unable to find local matches.</p> <p>In late January, one victim became the face of such exploitation that spurred a national outcry. In TikTok-style videos filmed from a village in the eastern province of Jiangsu, the woman was seen shivering in a doorless shed, standing with a chain around her neck and a lock hanging below her chin. She appeared mentally impaired and struggled to talk. She had lost most of her teeth. A bowl of cold food was left on a dusty bed next to her.</p> <p>The videos also revealed that the woman had given birth to seven sons and one daughter. In one clip, Dong Zhimin, the father of the children, casually said he had many children to earn respect from fellow villagers. He gave them auspicious names such as “gold mountain,” “bank,” “space travel,” and “Hong Kong.”</p> <p>The abuse of the woman incensed millions across a country that has for the most part emerged from poverty and moved on from dated practices such as forced marriages. And it broke Zhang’s heart to think that her daughter could have met the same fate 14 years after she left home for school with a ponytail and never returned.</p> <p>One afternoon in April 2008, several months before China hosted its first-ever Olympic Games in Beijing, Zhang received an unexpected phone call from her daughter’s school.</p>

Zhang worked at a family-run restaurant near her home in suburban Beijing. She had said goodbye just an hour ago to her daughter, Yao, who headed out on a bicycle to go to school. It was Saturday, but like many students in China, Yao attended a weekend tutoring session at her junior high school to prepare for demanding exams.

But the teacher called and asked why her 14-year-old daughter was absent.

Anxious that Yao had gotten into an accident, Zhang and her husband searched every spot on the teenager's way to school and asked every person who might have seen her. In the late afternoon, Zhang spotted Yao's white sneaker—by the cornfield, next to a pile of trash and weeds. Her stomach lurched. Some 14 years later, Zhang has held on to the shoe as the last sign of her daughter's existence, and she holds out hope of seeing her again one day, like some have in [tearful reunions](#) frequently celebrated on Chinese television and even turned into hit movies.

But those reunions are also a reminder of a history of human trafficking once prevalent in large swathes of the country, a phenomenon sociologists say is not unique to China and which they attribute to a mix of economic and social factors. Official data on the trafficking of women are scarce in China. Globally, more than half of human trafficking victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation, according to a 2020 [United Nations report](#). Of every 10 victims detected worldwide, five are adult women and two are girls.

And as China held its second Olympic Games earlier this year and projected itself as a prosperous and confident country, the videos of the chained woman shattered any notion that human trafficking was a thing of the past in the rising power. While the authorities were mindful of managing its global image as the spotlight fell on sporting spectacles in the Chinese capital, citizens openly questioned just how many trafficked Chinese women are subjected to inhumane abuse today and whether the authorities are doing enough, if anything, to address their plight. They have [battled with internet censors](#) to vent their anger and petition for change.

Police in China record [a few thousand trafficking cases](#) involving women and children every year. Chinese [court records](#) and [anthropological studies](#) showed female victims of human trafficking were typically brought from Vietnam, Myanmar, North Korea and [China's southwestern border](#) to bachelors in the populous inland provinces, where the male-to-female ratios are highly disparate and economic development stagnated.

In exchange, the women's parents receive cash payments and the often-false promise that their daughters would live a comfortable life with their future husbands. Many other victims were deceived with promises of job opportunities away from home.

But the official data likely only account for a small fraction of the trafficking, forced marriage, and sexual assault committed against women, as many who are living with violence, stigma, and poverty are unable to pursue a criminal investigation.

The chained woman in Feng county, Xuzhou city, Jiangsu province could be one of the numerous women who have been suffering in silence.

What is fueling the outcry is not only the inhumane treatment of the chained woman, but also the authorities' years of negligence of the cruelty committed to her, and their perceived attempts to cover up the crime.

At first, the local government denied accusations of trafficking. In an official [statement](#) issued on Jan. 30, days after the videos went viral, Feng county said Dong's father found the woman when she was begging on the streets in 1998. Dong started putting chains on her because she, supposedly afflicted with mental disorders, was smashing objects and beating up family members, government investigators said.

The official story changed later. In a third [statement](#) on Feb. 7, officials said the woman was someone nicknamed Xiahuamei, or Little Flower Plum, from a remote village on the Chinese-Myanmar border

populated by ethnic minorities. She allegedly got lost when a fellow villager took her to eastern China to get medical treatment.

These inconsistent explanations, coupled with internet censorship, did not ease public anger, as people continued pushing for an investigation into nationwide trafficking networks and a chance for the woman to speak for herself.

With most state-controlled media outlets silent on the controversy, former investigative journalists went to the woman's hometown to look for her relatives. People who sympathized with the woman [handed out flyers](#) on the streets of Shanghai to advocate for her. Two young women embarked on a journey to visit her in hospital, a mission cheered on by tens of thousands of internet users, although police soon detained them and accused them of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," one of them [wrote](#) on the microblogging site Weibo after she was released.

Meanwhile, more evidence of the prevalent bride trade surfaced and began to garner public attention. The court of Feng county was [found](#) to have rejected at least two women's requests to end their forced marriage and ordered them to treasure their families. A [photo album](#) documenting the lives of mentally ill women sold into sex slavery went viral.

People are again sharing the 2007 drama film *Blind Mountain*, which depicts the kidnapping and trafficking of a female university student. Its director, Li Yang, [said](#) people could share his film to support the campaign against trafficking and he wouldn't pursue copyright charges.

A 32-year-old woman surnamed Ke told VICE World News that videos of the chained woman prompted her to pursue an investigation into the trafficking of her own mother, a school teacher who was also sold to Feng county in the '80s from the northwestern province of Shaanxi, after an agent told her family she would find a better job in a bigger city.

Ke said her mother was locked up by another household and gave birth to a daughter. She escaped in around 1988, before marrying Ke's father. In 2008, Ke's mother made a report to police, but it was dismissed due to a lack of evidence. She ended her life by jumping into a river the same year.

"When I saw that woman, I was reminded of my mother," Ke said. Ke recently made a new report to police requesting an investigation. "I was thinking whether or not she was also treated like that, forced to have children, and prevented from having a life she had wanted."

In its most recent [report](#), released in late February, the government said DNA tests confirmed the chained woman is Little Flower Plum from Fugong county, Yunnan province. After one failed marriage, the woman, born in 1977, was lured to Jiangsu province in 1998 and sold three times to different men, before ending up in the shed. Three people, including the father of her eight children, have been [arrested](#) for trafficking, while 17 local officials were given penalties.

State media also released a video showing the woman receiving schizophrenia treatment in hospital. She lost her teeth due to severe gum infections, the hospital said, but internet users doubt this.

This week, the Chinese Ministry of Public Security [said](#) it would conduct a campaign against the trafficking of women and children and pay special attention to those with mental or physical disabilities.

The trafficking of women was common in imperial China before it came under crackdown in the early days of Communist Party rule, but the trade was revived under a thriving market economy following China's economic reforms, according to [researchers](#). For some villagers in the more developed eastern China, it is cheaper to buy a bride from remote mountains or neighboring countries than to pay dowry gifts to a local woman, and local cadres sometimes turn a blind eye.

“Women are so commonly viewed as commodities,” said Feng Yuan, a co-founder of Equality, a Beijing-based non-government group that assists victims of gender-based violence. “Buying and selling women has become prevalent because of this breeding ground.”

China’s skewed sex ratio at birth, itself a result of selective abortion of female fetuses, is often blamed for the bride trade. But activists say the root cause is the view that women are properties of their fathers, brothers, and husbands without their own free will. While trying to preserve stable families and boost birth rates, authorities are failing to protect women from trafficking, sexual violence, and other domestic abuse, the activists argue.

Zhou Xiaoxuan, a [leading figure](#) of China’s #MeToo movement, said while the chained woman’s mental illness, poverty and ethnic minority background had contributed to her extremely cruel exploitation, her fate—forced to produce offspring but stripped of freedom—reflects a struggle shared by the broader female population.

“The government wants women to enter a family and take up their sexual and childbearing duties, and they are not allowed to get out no matter what they experience in the meantime,” Zhou said. “Our demand is for the government to respect women’s basic human rights, so that they can survive in this society not just as a mother or a wife.”

Among child victims of trafficking, [girls are much more likely](#) than boys to be sold as spouses or sex workers after they were abducted or deceived with fraudulent job offers. The idea that missing girls would one day be found in a forced marriage like the chained woman has been a tormenting hope for their parents.

“We are suffering every single day,” said Xu Xiaoqin, whose 12-year-old daughter, Yang Ziyi, disappeared on her way to school in a mining town in the eastern province of Jiangxi in 2011. Yang should be 23 now.

“We are so scared our babies have been sold, married to someone, and forced to have children,” Xu said as she sobbed. “We dare not to even think about that. If we think that way, we would not be able to fall asleep at night.”

Zhang, the mother of the missing teenager Yao Li, moved to Beijing from the northeastern province of Heilongjiang, after she lost her job at a steel company amid massive layoffs at state factories in the ‘90s. She washed dishes and chopped ingredients at a restaurant run by her sister, while her husband took up gigs as a cleaner and security guard near the Beijing railway station.

Yao had been a quiet, obedient girl, Zhang recalled. She used to listen to songs by Taiwanese girl group S.H.E. on an MP3 player gifted by a relative. She loved roller skating but the family could not spare the money to get her a pair of skates—a decision Zhang now regrets. Yao dreamed of becoming a flight attendant, but she had never boarded a plane. “If I find Yao Li, I must take her onto a plane to check out the stewardess’ work,” the mother said.

Zhang had been a victim of domestic violence herself. After Yao disappeared, she said, the beating by her husband worsened. After he punched her in the face and wielded a meat cleaver at her about a year ago, Zhang moved out. Now she takes care of her own parents, while doing livestreams on social media to spread the word about Yao—the cheapest way to gather help.

Like other parents in search of their children online, Zhang repeats the same story over and over again during her daily livestream. “Good evening everyone, I’m looking for my only daughter,” Zhang, sitting in front of Yao’s photo, would explain every few minutes to viewers who just joined her channel. “My baby disappeared on her way to school in Beijing on an afternoon in 2008. She was 14 years old then.”

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SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/03/white-supremacist-propaganda-anti-defamation-league
GIST	<p>The propagation of White supremacist propaganda in the United States remained at historically high levels in 2021 despite a small recent dip, a new study from the Anti-Defamation League has revealed.</p> <p>ADL's research found that although 2021 data indicated a 5% drop in incidents of distributing white supremacist propaganda from 2020 – with 4,851 cases reported, compared with 5,125 the year before – the numbers remain at worryingly serious levels.</p> <p>Throughout 2021, white supremacist propaganda was reported in all states except Hawaii. The highest levels of propaganda activity occurred in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Texas, Massachusetts, Washington, Maryland and New York.</p> <p>There were also more actual events being held by extremist groups. “In 2021, ADL documented 108 white supremacist events, more than double the 53 events held in 2020, and the most events recorded in any of the past five years,” the ADL said on Thursday.</p> <p>The ADL found that in 2021, at least 38 white supremacist groups distributed propaganda, including pieces that presented Ashli Babbitt, a January 6 rioter, as a martyr for their cause. Other campaigns included ones that supported Kyle Rittenhouse – who shot and killed anti-racism protestors in Wisconsin – with propaganda pieces claiming “Kyle was right”.</p> <p>Among the 38 white supremacist groups tracked by the ADL, three groups – Patriot Front, New Jersey European Heritage Association (NJEHA) and Folkish Resistance Movement (FRM) – were found to be responsible for 91% of all propaganda activity.</p> <p>Patriot Front, a Texas-based alt-right group, was responsible for 3,992 of all the propaganda incidents in 2021, constituting more than 82% of nationwide incidents. According to ADL, the group distributed propaganda in every state except Hawaii and Alaska.</p> <p>The group's activities were largely concentrated in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Massachusetts, Texas and Maryland and its members were responsible for 82% of propaganda distribution across college campuses and 94% of white supremacist stenciled graffiti.</p> <p>NJEHA was behind 219 propaganda incidents last year, making up 5% of the total nationwide propaganda activity, a 57% decrease from their 2020 efforts. Its activities were recorded in 28 states but were mostly concentrated in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York and Florida.</p> <p>NJEHA's propaganda campaigns were found to have targeted various groups including Jewish people, Black people, immigrants or the LGBTQ+ community. Examples of their propaganda slogans include, “They hate you for being white”, “Stop the Third World invasion of America”, “There are only two genders”, “Black crimes matter”, and “Why are Jews censoring free speech?”</p> <p>FRM, a hate group created with the intent to spread national socialism, was responsible for the third highest number of propaganda incidents in 2021. Additionally, the group was responsible for 50% of antisemitic propaganda incidents last year. Its activities were recorded in 19 states but were mostly found in Minnesota, Mississippi, Arizona, Colorado and Texas.</p> <p>In addition to tracking white supremacist propaganda, the ADL also found that antisemitic propaganda distribution has skyrocketed compared to the previous year.</p> <p>The ADL recorded 352 propaganda incidents that included either antisemitic language or symbols, targeted Jewish institutions or both, marking a 27% jump from the previous year.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Mistrial: deadly Everett bus shooting
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SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/mistrial-declared-in-deadly-everett-bus-shooting-over-prosecutor-errors
GIST	<p>EVERETT, Wash. - Alejandro Meza of Lake Stevens, Washington, was convicted in October of first-degree manslaughter for killing a stranger on an Everett bus.</p> <p>But on Wednesday, a judge in Snohomish County Superior Court ordered a mistrial in the case, The Daily Herald reported.</p> <p>Judge Richard Okrent agreed with Meza's defense attorney that an accumulation of "errors" at trial by the deputy prosecutor in the case may have prejudiced the jury when it convicted the defendant.</p> <p>Okrent said deputy prosecutor Adam Sturdivant "misled the jury" and violated Meza's constitutional rights with several statements, including comments about Meza's right to remain silent and a reference to the killing of Gene Peterson, 33, as an "execution."</p> <p>Snohomish County Prosecutor Adam Cornell said his leadership team would review court documents to decide what to do next, which could include appealing the decision.</p> <p>Meza was charged with second-degree murder for Peterson's death on a Community Transit bus. The defendant was going to work in Mukilteo on March 7 last year.</p> <p>Meza got into a fight with Peterson, of Everett. According to Meza's trial testimony, Meza had confronted Peterson about smoking drugs on the bus.</p> <p>A Lake Stevens man who claimed self-defense when he shot and killed a passenger on a Community Transit bus last month has been charged in Snohomish County Superior Court with second-degree murder. Meza testified this conversation went "not as planned." He also claimed Peterson threatened to put him "to sleep."</p> <p>Peterson punched him in the face, surveillance video showed.</p> <p>A fight ensued in the aisle. Meza felt a hand on his waist where he kept his gun. He thought it was Peterson's hand, he said. Security footage showed it was the hand of Peterson's friend reaching in.</p> <p>Meza then fired a shot into Peterson's stomach. He told police the first shot was an accident. He then shot Peterson again, intentionally, police said Meza told them.</p> <p>After a weeklong trial, a jury convicted Meza of a lesser charge of first-degree manslaughter.</p> <p>"This is a very difficult case with a difficult set of facts and very difficult sets of interpretations," Okrent said Wednesday.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Tacoma police probe car fire ruled arson
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/police-investigating-after-car-fire-ruled-arson/VKU52PPFRBFTBJG3A442VSZXQI/
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — Tacoma police are investigating a car fire in which firefighters ruled an arson.</p> <p>Officers were called at 4:55 p.m. Thursday to the 1900 block of East D Street for a car fire.</p> <p>Firefighters at the scene determined the fire to be arson after finding a possible pipe bomb near the car.</p> <p>The police department's bomb unit was called to the scene and concluded the improvised explosive was no longer a threat.</p> <p>The investigation is ongoing.</p>

HEADLINE	03/03 Sharp surge in violence downtown Seattle
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/sharp-surge-violence-brings-mobile-police-precinct-downtown-seattle/I3DG5TPWP5GETIHOIWETYNDTMQ/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — A surge in violence is sparking change in downtown Seattle. The police department is boosting its presence in the troubled neighborhood near Third Avenue and Pine Street.</p> <p>That’s where a 15-year-old boy was murdered Wednesday night around 7:30 p.m. It’s the third shooting in 10 days within several blocks.</p> <p>Residents in the neighborhood woke up to a mobile police precinct and strong police presence of officers on bike patrols on Thursday. The block of Third Avenue between Pike and Pine streets was also clear from the usual mass of people there.</p> <p>“Hallelujah thank you, Jesus,” said Margaret Reid, who lives downtown.</p> <p>That’s the reaction from most people downtown. But many say it shouldn’t have taken the murder of a teen for the block to be cleared.</p> <p>“It’s sad. Somebody’s kid they raised,” said Dane Guntle, a Seattle resident. “Unfortunately I think it will be back to the same unless they try to get these blues off the street it’s just going to keep going on. Seattle needs to enforce on the drugs,” Guntle said.</p> <p>The latest deadly shooting comes after another man was murdered here Sunday, and yet another man was shot in the face last Monday.</p> <p>“What we’re really concerned on is getting it to stop. To have a 15-year-old shot here at 7:15 at night is just absolutely devastating and unacceptable,” said Detective Valerie Carson with the Seattle Police Department on Wednesday night.</p> <p>Seattle Police Chief Adrian Diaz said in a statement on Thursday afternoon that the police department “will be launching an initiative to curb the violent criminal behavior in the area surrounding 3rd Ave., between Pike and Pine St.”</p> <p>Business owner Brandon Davis runs Profit 3D, a 3D printing company near Third and Pike.</p> <p>“Sometimes I don’t want to work late because I’m thinking maybe it’ll be me that gets shot,” Davis said. “You come out here and it is a open drug market,” he said.</p> <p>He’s calling on the mayor to make changes.</p> <p>" I’d like the mayor to have less press conferences and I’d like him to actually tell the police to enforce the laws as written,” Davis said.</p> <p>In a statement, Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell said in part:</p> <p>“These continued acts of violence and street disorder are unacceptable and beyond tragic. My heart is filled with sorrow. ... We are launching a comprehensive and collaborative approach to address this crisis.”</p> <p>The police presence currently at Third and Pine is similar to the response Seattle police launched nearly two weeks ago at 12th and Jackson in Little Saigon, another trouble hot spot.</p> <p>“It used to be like 100 people here at all times,” said Taylor Coon, a Little Saigon resident. “Just an open-air drug market,” he said.</p>

After a string of shootings there, police set up a mobile precinct.

“It’s all clear now which is definitely an obvious improvement. We couldn’t even be standing here a week ago,” Coon said.

But some people say the crowd simply relocated.

“They’ll kick them out and you hear them talking to each other. Oh, let’s go down towards that way,” said Carlos Manuel, who was working in Little Saigon on Thursday. “It was a massive amount but now they’ve reduced themselves to three or four ‘vendors’ per corner if you want to call them that,” Manuel said.

In the past two weeks since 12th and Jackson was cleared, violence near 3rd and Pine has escalated with three shootings in 10 days, including deadly incidents on Sunday and Thursday nights.

“We charge every shooting case that’s been sent to us,” said Casey McNerthney, spokesperson for the King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office.

McNerthney added that his department has not yet received documents from Seattle police to file charges on many recent felonies.

“We know they’re working very hard to get us the cases. Ultimately most of the cases haven’t been sent to us. But that’s not blaming police,” McNerthney said. “We know the Seattle Police Department is down several hundred officers from where they’re supposed to be,” he said.

Diaz said patrol officers at 12th and Jackson would be replaced with non-patrol personnel to staff the mobile precinct there, in order to free up officers downtown.

The full statement from Mayor Harrell’s office is below:

“These continued acts of violence and street disorder are unacceptable and beyond tragic. My heart is filled with sorrow for the victims – for the individuals and families traumatized; for the downtown residents, workers and businesses with no choice but to live and work alongside recurring crime and gun violence; and for people across Seattle who should see downtown as a thriving beacon for our city and region but instead continue to see a corridor defined by chaos, dysfunction, and tragedy.

“While these problems are years in the making, my administration is acting with urgency by increasing police presence and working to activate downtown. Ensuring visible and sustainable change requires additional effort. Working with Chief Diaz, law enforcement partners and community advocates, we are launching a comprehensive and collaborative approach to address this crisis.

“These issues have only furthered my resolve to restore and strengthen the severely understaffed police department that I inherited. We need more officers to meet our public safety needs. As mayor, it’s my job to be the chief recruiter for our city. To those who share my belief that Seattle must be safe for everyone, I encourage you to be part of the solution and consider applying to join our police service today.

“In One Seattle, we believe everyone has the absolute right to feel safe. Despite our best early efforts, it’s clear we are not there yet. Until then, One Seattle means a shared sense of heartbreak when crime and violence impact our communities, as well as a shared commitment to do better.”

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HEADLINE	03/03 SPD to ‘maintain results’ crime reduction
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/seattle-police-chinatown-international-district-crime/281-0512792c-5153-4b1e-8cc4-9e00e9063605

GIST	<p>SEATTLE — While the Seattle Police Department shifts courses to address crime on Third Avenue and Pine, Seattle Police Chief Adrien Diaz says they'll work to continue the progress made in the Chinatown-International District (CID).</p> <p>Late Thursday afternoon and two Seattle Police officers were working the block near 12th Avenue and Jackson Street, making it clear things are changing. What was once described as an open-air drug market is now an empty sidewalk -- and that's a big deal.</p> <p>"We're just seeing if, when the police leave, is this activity going to come back?" said Tanya Woo.</p> <p>Woo is part of the CID Community Watch, a group of volunteers that during the start of the pandemic started walking the streets as an extra set of eyes and ears.</p> <p>"We just kind of developed to fill a gap and just to let people know that we are here and that we're friendly and want to help," Woo said.</p> <p>Last month the Seattle Police Department parked a mobile precinct in the area, cleared out the sidewalks and have maintained a visible police presence. It's a strategy Seattle's Interim Police Chief Adrian Diaz described as "transformative police work."</p> <p>"I feel like it's too early to tell. We are afraid that this activity is going to come back. We're not entirely sure if this is going to be a short-term fix, quick fix. We're hoping to work with the city on long-term sustainable solutions," Woo said.</p> <p>However, progress isn't always linear.</p> <p>Wednesday Seattle police warned of a man who pushed a woman down a flight of stairs at a light rail station and is believed to have stabbed a second person. Police advised Woo and her community watch to take the night off. They walked anyway.</p> <p>"I feel like the city doesn't know what to do with us because we are a mostly minority community there has been a lot of trauma here," said Woo.</p> <p>Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell is expected to address the crime on 12th Avenue and Jackson Street and will likely touch on what's happened on 3rd and Pine during a press conference Friday morning.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Tacoma still waits resolution Ellis' death
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/tacoma/manuel-ellis-death-two-year-anniversary/281-7902bfef-7889-44b6-8ead-849e31b0cea4
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — Tacoma has hit a grim milestone for many of its residents: it's been two years since the murder of Manuel Ellis.</p> <p>Ellis was murdered back in 2020 while being taken into police custody.</p> <p>Video of the incident shows Ellis being repeatedly punched and choked, and officers using a Taser and kneeling on him.</p> <p>Ellis was pronounced dead at the scene. His death was later ruled a homicide by the Pierce County Medical Examiner's office.</p> <p>Now, two years later, the city is still waiting for a resolution.</p> <p>"There's still no justice, you know? He's buried, but there's no honor," said Pastor Gregory Christopher, President of the Tacoma Ministerial Alliance. "There's a wound that's still open in the lives of people of</p>

color, especially his family, and we can't even begin to heal because after two years and still, there's no justice for Manuel Ellis, so we're really in a bad place."

Since Ellis' murder, Tacoma has seen changes to its city council and police department, including a new chief.

But what hasn't changed is the employment status of the three officers who were charged for Ellis's death.

Timothy Rankine, Christopher Burbank, and Matthew Collins all remain fully employed by the Tacoma Police Department, something LegallyBlack founder Tisha Marie said only pours salt in a deep wound.

"By keeping the officers on payroll, the city manager, city executive and our officials and police department are sending a message that we don't care that we killed another unarmed Black man, and we're gonna continue to pay them," she said.

But James Bible, the attorney for the Ellis family, said they have no intention of stopping until justice is served because the consequences go much further.

"What's really in the balance in cases like Manny Ellis, is not just whether Black Lives Matter, but whether Black people are treated as humans," Bible said.

KING 5 reached out to the Tacoma Police Department, but they said they cannot comment on an open investigation. The trial date for the three officers charged in Ellis's murder is scheduled for October 3, 2022.

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HEADLINE	03/03 Arrest longtime fugitive stuns Puerto Rico
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/arrest-longtime-canadian-fugitive-stuns-puerto-rico-83245772
GIST	<p>SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico -- Last week, phones across Puerto Rico began to ding as members of a private WhatsApp group dedicated to helping others in the U.S. territory stared at their screens in disbelief.</p> <p>The businessman they knew as administrator of that chat and as someone who organized philanthropic efforts such as a Christmas toy drive for needy children and renovations for an elementary school had just been arrested.</p> <p>Conor Vincent D'Monte, known as Johnny Williams in Puerto Rico, was allegedly a leader of a violent gang sought by Canadian authorities on charges including first-degree murder. He had been on the run for more than a decade.</p> <p>"It's like a Netflix story," said Antonio Torres, chief deputy U.S. Marshal for the district of Puerto Rico.</p> <p>Authorities don't know exactly when D'Monte, 44, arrived in Puerto Rico, but they believe he had been using the alias "Johnny Williams" in the island for at least several months. The six-foot-one-inch fugitive settled into a rural, eastern mountain community near El Yunque rainforest, living in a house in front of a street with no name in a working-class neighborhood, Torres said.</p> <p>Every month, D'Monte would accompany employees of a nonprofit organization known as Karma Honey Project and attend a farmer's market in the nearby city of Carolina, said a woman who lived in the same community as him and sold goods next to his stall. She declined to give her name out of fear.</p> <p>"No one knew anything," she said, adding that she always was struck by his quiet demeanor. "We were surprised."</p> <p>D'Monte remains in federal prison in Puerto Rico as he awaits an extradition process. His public defense attorney declined comment, but she noted in a court hearing on Thursday that D'Monte, who has Canadian and Irish citizenship, requested that the consulates of those countries be notified.</p>

Those who met D'Monte said he never made any efforts to hide. He even met with Puerto Rico's agriculture secretary and a local senator and was invited to the governor's mansion last month for his role in trying to save honeybees after Hurricane Maria as part of his involvement with the Karma Honey Project, a nonprofit company created in February 2019. Its president, Candice Galek, is a Miami entrepreneur and former model. Neither Galek nor her company returned messages for comment.

In its 2020 annual report, the most recent one available, the company stated that its volume of business did not exceed \$3 million. Its balance sheet noted that it had no assets or liabilities, according to filings with Puerto Rico's Registry of Corporations and Entities.

"The guy fooled us all," said a Puerto Rican businessman who asked that his name not be used out of fear.

He said he met D'Monte in the early days of the pandemic after being added to his WhatsApp group, and that D'Monte was known as "Johnny Teeth," because his teeth were so white and straight. The businessman described D'Monte as a "tremendous sales guy" who was very jovial.

"It struck me that he didn't have Facebook or any of those things because he truly was a great networker," the businessman said, adding that D'Monte once called him asking if he could borrow a hammer since he was helping repair a school.

When he was working on the Christmas toy drive, D'Monte messaged his WhatsApp group warning they were 500 presents short and that he was "grinding" to get donations as he noted that the prices went up 40% at the toy distributor warehouse: "Caught us off guard. Will figure it out. Universe conspires," he wrote, adding three different star emojis.

It's unclear why D'Monte chose Puerto Rico or if he knew anyone in the U.S. territory.

He is accused in the killing of a rival gang member at a Vancouver strip mall in February 2009, at a time when that part of British Columbia was experiencing one of the worst gang violence outbreaks in its history, according to a police statement.

D'Monte also is accused of conspiring to murder two alleged rival gang members known as the Bacon Brothers, according to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The United Nations gang that D'Monte belongs to is considered one of the most powerful ones in British Columbia and is best known for exporting one of the most popular marijuana strains in the U.S. mainland: the B.C. bud.

At its height, the gang had an estimated 200 members, and they often sport tattoos of tigers, dragons and Chinese characters. The gang also imports firearms and other drugs including cocaine, making millions of dollars a year, said Keiron McConnell, a criminal justice expert and professor at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Surrey, British Columbia.

"Anyone thinking that Mr. D'Monte was a street corner hustler, it couldn't be further than the truth," he said in a phone interview. "Mr. D'Monte was a fairly sophisticated individual."

McConnell said it's highly unusual for fugitives to be on the run for as long as D'Monte and to successfully assimilate themselves into a community.

D'Monte, whom police said has traveled to Spain and Asia and is associated with a drug network in Mexico, was last seen in the Vancouver area in January 2011. After that, he vanished until he reappeared in Puerto Rico more than a decade later.

Torres, with the U.S. Marshals Service, said high-profile fugitives often assume the profile of a very wealthy person because they have the means.

	<p>"It doesn't raise any red flags," he said. "It will draw attention, but not suspicion. They just act like a businessman."</p> <p>Three weeks before federal agents arrested D'Monte, Torres said his agency finally had collected enough information to identify the fugitive, noting they never received any tips.</p> <p>As D'Monte drove through the popular tourist district of Isla Verde on Feb. 25, the agents closed in.</p> <p>"He acted surprised," Torres said, adding that he didn't resist arrest.</p> <p>D'Monte was alone, except for a 9mm at his side.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Ex-cop Breonna Taylor shooting not guilty
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/jury-finds-officer-brett-hankison-guilty-counts-shooting/story?id=83234566
GIST	<p>A jury in Louisville, Kentucky, has found Brett Hankison, the former police officer charged with recklessly shooting into a neighboring apartment during the course of the raid that ended with the death of Breonna Taylor, not guilty on all three counts of wanton endangerment in the first degree.</p> <p>Hankison was charged with three counts of wanton endangerment for firing multiple shots into a neighboring apartment that endangered the lives of three people on March 13, 2020.</p> <p>The jury deliberated for just three hours before returning its verdict.</p> <p>Hankison fired 10 shots into Taylor's apartment, several of which entered a neighboring apartment where a man, child and pregnant woman were living, according to prosecutors.</p> <p>Prosecutors said Cody Etherton, Chelsey Napper, and her son, Zayden, were all sleeping at the time of the shooting.</p> <p>Bullets and casings from Hankison's gun were found at the scene and retrieved from a common wall of Taylor and her neighbors.</p> <p>In an interview with Louisville Metro Police Department's Public Integrity Unit in the weeks following the shooting, Hankison alleged that he saw muzzle flashes and was "certain" at the time he heard an AR-15 rifle firing out of the apartment.</p> <p>After he heard gunshots, Hankison said he thought fellow officer Sgt. Jonathan Mattingly had been shot. He said he assumed other officers were hit as well.</p> <p>"I thought they were just being executed," he said.</p> <p>No AR-15 rifle or corresponding bullets or casings were found on the scene.</p> <p>The prosecution delivered its closing arguments Thursday.</p> <p>"This is not a case to decide who is at fault for the tragic death of Breonna Taylor," prosecutor Barbara Whaley told the court. "This is not a case about civil rights violations under federal law or the United States Constitution. And this is not a case about Kenneth Walker. Whether what he did that night was right or wrong, this is not your decision."</p> <p>Hankison, and fellow officers Myles Cosgrove and Mattingly, fired 32 shots into Taylor's apartment while serving a "no-knock" warrant. Taylor, who was in her bedroom in the apartment, was killed.</p>

The plainclothes officers were serving the warrant searching for Taylor's ex-boyfriend, who they allege was dealing drugs. He was not at the residence, but her current boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, thought someone was breaking into the home and fired one shot from a 9 mm pistol at the officers. Mattingly was struck in the leg and three officers opened fire, killing the 26-year-old Taylor.

"This case is about the actions of Brett Hankison when he shot into the side of that building in the opposite direction from those who were in the line of fire coming out of the apartment," Whaley continued.

Two bullets that had entered the ceiling were also found in the apartment above Taylor's. They were determined to have not come from Hankison's gun.

"It's interesting that the only person charged with wanton endangerment for the same conduct is Brett Hankison," defense attorney Stew Mathews said in his closing.

The prosecution contended that Hankison, who was an officer with the LMPD for nearly 21 years, was aware of the risk of his alleged "wanton conduct."

"This was not justice for Mr. Etherton, Ms. Napper, or her young son," Walker's lawyer, Frederick Moore III, said in a statement following the ruling. "This was not justice for Breonna Taylor or Kenneth Walker. Kenneth Walker was assaulted by the state, and lives among us devoid of apology or recognition for the harm done to him."

Hankison told the court in his testimony on Wednesday that he was not aware of the layout of the apartment or apartment complex prior to the execution of the warrant.

"The events of March 13, 2020 are still painful for many, and since then LMPD has prioritized rebuilding trust with the communities that we serve," the Louisville Metro Police Department said in a statement. "LMPD respects the judicial process and also recognizes that there are still potentially more proceedings that may be held on this case and will not provide further comment at this time."

Taylor's attorney, Ben Crump, responded to the ruling, saying, "The lack of accountability showcased in every aspect of Breonna's killing speaks to how much more work there is to be done before we can say our justice system is fair and our system of policing is protective of people of color."

Taylor's death sparked outrage nationwide and protests calling for the officers to be held accountable for the killing. To this day, no one has been charged with her death.

Hankison and Cosgrove were both fired from the police department.

"Today, the jury rendered its decision. We appreciate the hard work of our prosecutors and respect the decision of the jury," Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron said in a statement after the verdict was read on Thursday.

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